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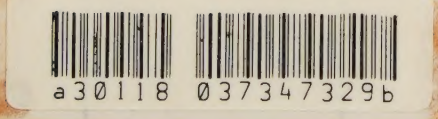

THE MYSTERY OF THE BARREN LANDS

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THE MYSTERY
OF THE
BARREN LANDS

BY
RIDGWELL CULLUM
Author of
"The Heart of Unaga," "The Night-riders," etc.

RESERVE

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The Mystery of the Barren Lands

CHAPTER I

THE BARRENS

An unmapped world of low granite undulations. A network of meandering watercourses. A great river — a centring channel—streaming through gorge and plain, lounging drearily through a misty desolation of marsh-lakes that storm like the open sea. Denizened by the hardiest and shyest ; a preying ground for wolf, and fox, and currish coyote ; a sure hiding for timid caribou, and the scarcer musk-ox, for arctic hares and lemmings ; it is the oldest of all the Canadian Northland. The Barrens.

. . . . .

The hill rose steeply. It towered above the western bank of the freshet-flooded river below. It was a bald, grim hummock, a rocky billow, like a tidal wave in a granite sea.

Moisture was everywhere. It weighted the raw air. It glistened on the bare rock. It steamed up from the newly thawed river. It rolled heavily in blinding mists, white clouds that looked to have been flung to earth from the sky above. It saturated the lichen garment that did its best to hide up the rocky nakedness. At every tread of the slipping human feet the fungus-like growth streamed moisture as it tore from its precarious hold. While over all the mock of spring sunshine was challenging the world to take heart.

Andrew Kenyon had reached the summit of the hill. He turned, holding out a helping hand to his companion. But his help was laughingly disregarded. There was none required. And the sound of that happy laughter in the desolation of the Barrens was very surely an anachronism.

In a moment the girl was standing beside the man, and her big blue eyes were narrowed, searching the treeless distance beyond the river.

"It's grim! It's about as happy as the dumps round a new started city, only it hasn't that human touch."

The man's tone was not all impatience and dislike. It was touched with an awe he did not realize.

The girl's smile had a dash of mischief.

"Don't weaken, Uncle Andy. It's more than that."

"More?"

The man's tone protested impossibility.

June Kenyon gave a wise little nod. And, as her smile died out, the blue of her eyes seemed to deepen to violet.

She was more than pretty. Much more. The clear, bright eyes that looked out of their weather-tanned setting had something of the fresh beauty of the vivid arctic flowers that would presently respond to the lure of the spring sunshine. But they were profound with an intelligence and courage that seemed to dominate her expression at all times. These things were discernible in every other feature, too. Her shapely nose was sensitive. Her mouth and chin were firmly moulded.

Her flaming, short-cut hair was enveloped in a cap of plucked beaver drawn low down on her head in defence against the chill spring air. And her slim young body, in its multi-hued blanket jumper, which terminated in mannish cord breeches, was as full of grace and youthful strength as that of any young athlete.

"Oh, yes," she said decidedly, "it's like the mournful foundations of an unfinished, abandoned creation. It looks like a tremendous inception that overwhelmed its author

when He realized the task He'd set Himself. Oh, it's grim all right. But it's sad—sad. Why ? I wonder why ? "

" The only *why* to me, Juny, is that a normally sane uncle and a particularly bright niece are stopping around, living like cave folk in a wilderness of granite and muskeg, chasing up something and some one who don't seem to exist, never has existed, and is never likely to exist. And that they've been doing it for two years, and look like doing it for the rest of their foolish lives if some one with sense don't club 'em out of it."

Andrew Kenyon's eyes twinkled as he produced a plug of tobacco and began to flake it with his sheath knife.

For some moments there was no reply. June was searching the skyline where the mists were rolling up under the sun's influence and laying bare the barren, lower slopes of an outcrop of far off hills.

She turned presently. She shot a quick glance into the preoccupied face of the man who had come into her life to fill the place of her dead father. She eyed the keen, clean-shaven features intent upon the filling of his pipe. They were strong, even to hardness, with his eyes hidden. But that was mainly due to the tangle of lines scrawled about his mouth, and between his even, dark brows. She knew they belied him. In reality he was a creature of light heart and simple purpose. So far as she knew the only hardness in him was his unyielding purpose in the things that had brought them into the Barrens two years before. Well, she was with him in that to the last ditch, the last of her youthful strength and courage.

" We shall find him all right, Uncle Andy," she said quietly, as the other packed his pipe, and lit it, and put away his knife and tobacco. " We've got to," she added, emphatically.

The man nodded without verbal reply. But he hunched his great breadth of shoulder under his blue cloth pea-jacket. It was an aggressive movement of purpose which June knew so well.

Like June, her uncle was clad in the clothing of the northern world. His high-legged boots and cord breeches were stained and worn. So was his fur-lined jacket and the cap on his head. But the ensemble was of a youthful man, whose forty-five years sat lightly on him. They looked only to have contrived the perfect maturity of immense physical resources.

"Yes," he agreed. "I s'pose we will. We must, anyway."

He was gazing down at the kyak on the river below, where it strained at its rawhide mooring under pressure of the freshet.

"Do you get it, Juny?" he went on abruptly. "We haven't a thing to show for two years of work but the outer toughening the weather's put on to our faces, and the damnable scars of the skitters. We've done all that's humanly possible, and often enough things I've sometimes guessed weren't. We've smelt out every stream and lake that's been possible to us in summer. And in winter, when the cursed muskegs are frozen feet deep, we've taken chances that leave Corporal Spence guessing we're plumb crazed. And there's never been a sign, or a hope. Not the smallest. Nothing. Just nothing. Sometimes I wonder if your father was right after all. Warren was a sure sort of creature. It wasn't his way to make mistakes. Maybe he came to think he couldn't make 'em. I don't know. Sometimes, lately, I wake at nights—doubting." He gestured with his pipe. "Will-o-th'-wisp, eh? We'll need to beat it back to the old Gateway and plan afresh."

June was still studying those grim, far hills whose summits had slowly bared and now stood out dead white under their crowning of unmelted snow.

"Yes," she agreed. "We'll need to plan afresh." Then she added thoughtfully; "There's always my hunch, though."

Her uncle removed his pipe.

"You mean—those hills?"

He nodded and gazed at the far white range running north and south along the horizon.

"Of course," June said, and laughed. She raised a mitted hand and pointed. "There they are. Look at them. They're waiting. Always waiting, every time we look to the northwest. Why not?" she cried, almost sharply. "Why in the world not?"

"That's Bucket's territory."

"Well?"

"What's the use. Bucket knows every foot of them. He's trapped 'em and shot 'em years. There isn't a part of those hills he can get to he doesn't know. And he swears there isn't a thing but wolf and fox, and an occasional caribou or deer. He says there isn't even an Indian to be found there, except those he takes with him. It would take us five summers at least to get even an idea of those hills. And Bucket says there's nothing there—but hills."

"Bucket would say that—if it suited him."

"I know. You don't like Bucket."

"Do you, uncle?"

June's question flashed on the instant.

Andrew Kenyon shook his head with a laugh that told his feelings plainly.

"Could anyone?" he asked. "Bucket's the inevitable result of misplaced civilization. Left to his natural state, Bucket would have played some nasty trick early in life, and the other fellow would have killed him quick, and there'd have been no more argument. As it is, his folks seem to have been wealthy citizens of Montreal. He was wrapped in soft packing and sent to college. Then he was tricked out and sent to look over the world, and work off all his foul steam. I don't see why the world should have been made to put up with Bucket that way. But it appears it did kick at last. And I gather it kicked good. When Bucket got that kick, he seems to have realized he had need of the only place no one else had use for. Anyway that's the notion I've picked up. Bucket's the sort of company I could always take a

high-ball with. But I'd mix my own high-ball while I held tight to my pocket-book. I wouldn't trust Bucket in pickle."

"Yet you quote him on—my hills."

"Because five years' searching them doesn't look good to me—yet."

"Then we may go to them?" June snatched at the qualification.

"When we've sieved the rest clean."

June's eyes darkened.

"I think Bucket's more than all you said, uncle. Bucket's lived up here years. You think his world's kicked him out. But you don't suggest his particular crime. He lives here by trapping and shooting those hills. Sometimes I wonder. I've seen him eat raw fish like an Eskimo. He drinks everything he can lay hands on from home-brew to red-ink. He sneers at Mr Arden, and treats Indians as if they weren't human. He never quits these Barrens farther than Vannie Smith's on Bluff Lake, down the river. He hugs these Barrens the same as the criminal, and the leper that hides himself in the old world tombs. He's college bred, and he makes me wonder all the time. Those hills will need to be searched before we're through. If it's only because Bucket says there's nothing there."

Andrew Kenyon laughed.

"You can't beat a woman at hating the man she doesn't like, Juny," he said.

"And you can't beat her when instinct shows her the way. One day I'm going to hunt those hills—alone."

"Alone? Not on your life! You? Say!"

The pipe had been snatched from the man's mouth, and there was no mistaking the anxiety behind his words. He knew June's impulse and even recklessness. But most of all he knew the passionate purpose driving her in the task her dead father had set out for them both.

But the sight of her uncle's worry appealed to the girl's humour. She laughed delightedly.

"If you could only see yourself, Uncle Andy," she cried, happily. "The country's most famous engineer. The big, strong man. The relentless sleuth of the Barrens. Scared! Scared to death! Scared like any jack-rabbit. And merely at the thought of his vowed confederate taking a chance. My!"

June's eyes were dancing. The big blue pupils flashed with her mischief. Then, as suddenly as her laughter came, it passed. It was gone even to her smile. She turned away abruptly.

For some moments she gazed out at the distance lost in thought. Then she came close up to the man she had derided, and laid an appealing brown hand on his arm.

"Uncle dear, forgive me," she cried. "But I'm in such deadly earnest. I don't want to miss a thing. We daren't. We just daren't. Whatever happens our search must reach the remotest corners. Don't you see? But, of course, you do. Think. Think what it all means. Think of the awfulness of any neglect by us. Think of poor father, his last dying moments ghost-haunted and horrible with the thought the he—he alone was responsible. His letter, written within a day of his death. Ours is the task. Ours the responsibility —now. Only our work, our lives, stand between the country we both love and a disaster whose horror I dream about in nightmares that nearly set me crazy. Nothing we can do must be left undone. Nothing. We mustn't count our stupid lives. That spectre is marching on. All the time it's moving on, on, working its unholy will."

June paused a little breathlessly. She gazed up at the steady grey eyes brooding on the far hills.

"But there," she went on presently, steadying herself with an effort. "I know there's no need for me to urge. It all goes with you as surely as with me. Uncle, I'll never, never, as long as I live, forget those last words of poor father. You remember? We read them together. 'I appeal to you both in the name of humanity, and the affection we have shared together for so many years. Let nothing deter you

nothing deflect you. Get Noel Maddox. Make his diabolical mischief impossible. And then, but not till then, I shall sleep at peace in my grave.' "

The grey ugliness of the world still absorbed the man. But as June fell silent he patted the hand resting on his arm.

" We're no quitters, kid," he said, simply.

CHAPTER II

THE GATEWAY

In the grey noon haze June Kenyon searched its monstrous loom. It was impressive. Even overwhelming. For two years its fascination had never failed to hold her. In all that time there had never been a glance turned in its direction without her senses responding in some degree to its grandeur and mystery. Now she believed it meant more, much more, than a wonderful feat of Nature in Her most extravagant mood.

June was absorbed. She had no thought for anything else while the fascination of the Gateway held her imagination. The man behind her was forgotten. So, too, was her month of hardship and disappointment amongst the muskegs and marsh rivers of the ugly backlands of the barren world from which they had just emerged. Here was home. But, much more absorbing, here was—the Gateway.

As she knelt up against the forward strut of the stout canoe, and dipped her paddle with that rhythmic thrust which two years of riverwork had brought to something very near perfection, and surveyed the far off misty immensity, she felt that it was somehow all a little mad.

There stood a vast barrier, set up seemingly for no particular reason, except as an expression of Nature's violent upheaval. A towering barrier of sheer granite cutting off the northern world from all the rest. Far as the eye could see, away to east and west, it reached out, bare and dour, and without slope. It looked to be clean cut in an amazing perpendicular, a sheer six hundred feet of inaccessible

height. Then, in the very centre of it, at the northern extremity of Green Lake, was the only break for hundreds of miles. The Gateway!

The Gateway was a rift, as its name suggested, a gaping portal. It was no less sheer than all the rest. No less clean-cut. It was half a mile wide at least, but looked much less, and it yawned on the northern shores devouring the flowing waters of the Thelon river as they coursed through the heart of the lake. Through that misty, overshadowing canyon the waters streamed on so that the Arctic Seas might ultimately swallow them up.

The girl's mood was restless, eager. It was one, too, of great relief. This was her home-coming, but with such a different meaning from that which it had always had on other trips into the backlands. She believed that at last she had shown her uncle and partner that her whim to search the hills beyond the Barrens was no idle, foolish dreaming. That it was no girlish fancy. She believed she had convinced him that it was a reality. One of those logical inspirations which leap out unexpectedly from a tangle of straining thought.

In consequence the vision of the Gateway was more to her now than a thing of wonder and mystery. Was it not the gateway to Bucket's hill territory? The wonder was there, perhaps greater than ever. The mystery of it was stirring her deeply. But now she was searching it with a look of hard determination that robbed her blue eyes of something of their softness and girlish charm. She told herself she knew that the Gateway was grimly hurling at them both its voiceless, ironical challenge.

For all its apparent purposelessness the cliff which extended unvarying, unbroken for some two hundred miles, was not without beneficence for the life of the Barrens. Whatever else it accomplished it had helped to transform Green Lake and its adjacent territory into an oasis of shelter from the worst of the winter storming which made vegetation almost impossible on the granite foundations of the Barrens.

Under the lee of it grew, but scarcely flourished, a wide stretch of wind-swept woods. Jack-pine and the hardier spruces crowded together, huddled and leaning, doing little better than saving their poor, mean lives. On the other hand, sub-arctic growths flourished in their myriads on the dank shores of the lake, and in the muskeg bottoms. Lichens, of course, predominated. But hundreds of different plants of Alpine hardiness swarmed. And in the spring of the year, in response to the torrid heat of the sun, they painted a ravishing carpet of vivid hues with their infinitesimal blossoms. Then, too, the marsh lands yielded their amazing crop of giant reeds. While even the bottomless muskegs were induced to contribute a measure of artistry in their vivid weed-grass.

But there was also the human element which had made a home in its shelter. There were the Indians. The Caribou-eaters. They were classed as Indians, but had little about them to suggest the red man of the southern plains. The Caribou-eater was a low-grade creature built on the lines of the Eskimo, and yet without any real relation to him beyond his method of life. The Caribou-eater was just a fishing and pelt-hunting organism, with the general habits that allied him very closely to the animal world.

Throughout the years these people had foregathered on the shores of Green Lake. In summer they set up teepees little different from the teepees of other higher races. In winter, like the true Eskimo, they hewed themselves blocks of hard snow, and inhabited igloos, which at least defended them from the marrow-freezing cold. For the rest they were a benighted people who lived for their bellies, their ease, their superstitions, and their never-ending feud with the Yellow Knives, a race of neighbours no more exalted than themselves. And they asked no better of life than to be allowed to exist and propagate their species.

But these poor creatures could not be left without the unsolicited attentions of their superior white brothers. And so it came that the great Barrier afforded shelter to the little

white missionary, Mervyn Arden, who, with almost saintly self-sacrifice, nursemaided such spiritual life as the Caribou-eaters possessed, and did his best to heal and cleanse their sturdy bodies. As a young man he gave himself up to their regeneration. And, as an old man, now, that regeneration looked to be still a mere hope of the future.

The mothering of these people induced further white attention. It was three years since Corporal Eden Spence, of the Mounted Police, came with his motor-boat and offered up thanks for the shelter of the Barrier. In Mervyn Arden's case, years of service, over thirty years, had inspired the Indians with a dog-like affection and docility to his authority. The policeman, on the other hand, brought to bear the authority of fear. And thereby he accomplished in three years, if not devotion, at least the establishment of virtually complete authority.

Then had come June Kenyon and her uncle. But their coming had no relation to the lives of the Caribou-eaters. So far as concerned the Indians these newcomers were merely a source of curiosity and vague hope. The Indians saw them take possession of the old stone fortifications on the lake shore, known as Fort Gateway. It was a place no Indian would approach. For had it not been set up in days long since gone, by a race of white, fur-trading buccaneers who had left their ghosts behind them in the shape of bitter memory that had been handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter? If these two, with their white servants, chose to dwell in that ghost-haunted Fort, the Indians were quite content, and would be ready to receive any sort of largesse at their hands.

The advent of the Kenyons, however, meant much to the policeman and the missionary, who had known so little of white companionship. They welcomed the new arrivals. The more so that June was young and attractive, and her uncle proved amiably and hospitably inclined, and a man of keen mentality. When they discovered him to be a mining engineer, and he began to roam the Barrens, as though

seeking mineral prospects in a world given up to granite, they felt his optimism to be greater than his wisdom, and they smiled tolerantly. But when they realized his lavish expenditure on imported material and skilled labour to transform the stout ruins of the Fort into an almost luxurious home they were impressed.

The humanity foregathered at Green Lake certainly did much to cheer the brooding sadness of the place. But even so, such was its dour, its austerity, and the terrible nature of its winter storms, that humanity was powerless to translate it out of its desolation.

As the old Fort, standing out four square to the lake upon its sharp promontory, came into view, the girl's interest in the Gateway lessened. She turned at once to the new interest. The Indians, with their profound secrets and mysticisms, their child-like minds, were almost dear to her; whilst those others of her own colour were mentalities and personalities she could not spare. June was a youthful enthusiast living every moment of her life.

That which she sought was there back amongst the woods. She could see the moving figures. She could see the upstanding teepee poles amongst the trees. And the brown-skinned children, and the currish camp dogs were playing about in the sun.

And the shore, too. Numbers of kyaks and the broader oomiaks lay half in and half out of the water. Many of their owners were there preparing for their summer fishing.

Farther along, beyond the Fort, set well clear above flood water, and surrounded by attenuated scrub, stood the three primitive buildings of Arden's Mission. The school place; the church, with nothing to distinguish one from the other; and the poor hut in which the man himself endured his lonely life. To June those mud-walled buildings with their reed thatching, were treasured landmarks.

Farther along still, more nearly approaching the Barrier, was a habitation of another type altogether. It was Corporal Spence's official home. It was on a rising ground over-

looking the lake and forest, and was dug into a low hillside. It was characteristic. It was purposeful. It was the "look-out" of authority. And well enough June understood its necessity.

The girl's gaze came back to the Fort, where the log landing was moored below it. A solitary figure was standing there. And she found herself smiling with a sense of gladness. It was Wadda Charlie waiting for them. Her uncle's half-breed henchman, who had refused, with others, to be left in the comfort of civilization while those he served dared the hardships of the wilderness.

The canoe shot past the landing. Nor did the dipping of the paddles cease until it was abreast of the police quarters. Then the man in the stern spoke a single word. And as he did so he checked and held.

In an instant the light vessel swung. June remained with raised paddle ready. Then, when word came again, she fell to work. The boat drove doggedly into the heavy stream.

The vessel crept up to the landing. It was grabbed and held by Wadda Charlie. June leapt on to the swaying logs, carrying the mooring rope with her. And as Andrew Kenyon eased his cramped legs, and leisurely stepped ashore, he flung instructions at his servant.

"Get all the kit out, Wadda," he cried. "There's a deal of it wet. We bumped the rapids bad. There's those robes. And Miss June's blankets. And her sleeping sack. Get 'em all dried. You can pass the camp junk to Ma Gillian for cleaning. I'd say it needs it. Just run the canoe up on the bank and overhaul her bottom. She's in bad shape. Set the boys to tar her right away. I'll need her again quick."

June was paying no heed to the work of landing. She was gazing out at the swirl of mist drifting over the shining surface of the water and further obscuring the Gateway. She watched it for some moments till the last of the great gap was swallowed up. Then she turned to her uncle with a little smiling sigh.

"Another chapter closed, Uncle Andy," she said.

Andrew Kenyon paused in the act of filling his pipe, while Wadda struggled with the outfit.

"Cut out the 'closed,' Juny," he said. "It sounds like the end. And we're still only at the start of things."

June picked up a superb beaver robe and slung it across her shoulder. She laughed shortly.

"That's so," she said. "And anyway a chapter finished right needs a 'punch' in its last paragraph. We haven't brought that punch back with us."

Her uncle raised a hand and wiped a swarm of mosquitoes from their feeding ground on the back of his neck.

"Haven't we?" he demurred. "I don't know, Juny."

"You think——?"

But that which June would have said remained unspoken. The mists had shifted again. And now the mouth of the Gateway seemed to be grinning mockingly at her. Her uncle lit his pipe.

"Still worrying with that—hell gate?" he asked, noting her preoccupation. "Still yearning? You won't rest easy till—Say!"

The man swung about gazing up shore towards the settlement. June, too, had turned on the instant. Wadda had leapt to his feet with a startled look on a face rarely given to vital expression.

Pandemonium! Shrieks of terror from a hundred voices shrilled back there amongst the trees. The noon hush was crashed with a din of human panic—or fury. All along the shore the Indians had quit their work, to stand like folk paralysed, as they gazed back in the direction of their homes.

The yelling rose to a fierce crescendo. It fell to a moaning wail. But it came again louder than ever, added to by other voices in other directions. There could be no mistake now. It was not fury. It was terror, abject terror, and the rise and fall suggested a howling mob running hither and thither amongst the trees. Then came the inevitable. The camp dogs joined in. And scores of throats were opened to augment the din.

Suddenly there came visible movement. Figures appeared amongst the trees. Running, panic-stricken creatures in blankets, and buckskin, and furs. At first a few, howling and rushing towards the boats on the shore. Then came the full human tide, crowding, jostling, a headlong mob seeking escape from some pursuing terror.

Above the din three shots rang out in swift succession. They were heard by all, even the most demented in that panic-stricken mob. And the effect was instantaneous. The shrieks of terror ceased. There was a pause in the stampede. The mob stood, and turned, and waited.

June's hand fastened on her uncle's arm.

"That's Spence," she cried. "That's his automatic. I know its sound. He's shot him down. It's another crazy neche. Oh!"

She shuddered. Then her grip relaxed and her hands clasped in an agony of distress.

"Another!" she muttered.

. . . . .

It was writhing on the ground, bound hand and foot with stout rawhide. It was a stark, brown-skinned, nearly naked Indian, with one shattered leg, from which blood was streaming. And over him were standing two men who contrasted sharply.

Mervyn Arden was gazing down upon the inarticulate, struggling creature with eyes of the profoundest pity and pain. He was a little man with a slight, almost emaciated body whose heart must surely have been sizes too big for it. He was clad in rusty clothes that were worn and painfully patched to keep his body covered. They retained some sort of clerical seeming. But all these details faded to insignificance against the pity and simple kindliness of his thin grey face. He was an old, grey-haired man, but not because of his years. It was the wearing of the consuming fires of the spirit actuating him.

Eden Spence, of the Mounted Police, was a giant by comparison. He was not big in height, but his body was robust

and muscular, and his shoulders possessed abnormal breadth. He was dark-eyed and clean-shaven, and his features had that square look that somehow matched the cool steadiness of his eyes. He was considering two murderous looking weapons in his hands. The one was a hatchet of whiteman make. The other was a curved-bladed Indian flaying knife, nearly twelve inches in blade length. Both were without any ominous stain. But both had razor edges.

It was a small clearing surrounded by Indian dwellings. But not an Indian was to be seen. They were there, however. They were there, peering out horrified and fearful from the dim recesses of their homes, and hidden from view behind the hide habitations themselves, and the scrub of the sheltering woods. Terror was lurking in the brown hearts that refused to approach. But it was not physical fear now. Native superstition had been stirred to the dregs. The bound creature on the ground was—raving mad.

"His jaws have quit snapping."

Mervyn Arden suddenly dropped to his knees, and laid a hand over the Indian's heart. He held it there in spite of the madman's convulsions.

"He'll be dead in minutes, now," Spence replied, with a sigh of easement.

The grey head of the missionary inclined.

"Yes," he said, and the sharpness of the word told of emotions barely held under.

"It's generally a half hour from the start of the attack," Spence continued, in his calm way. "I guess his time's nearly up."

Arden stood up almost reluctantly. And for awhile the two men considered those final, decreasing convulsions. The Indian was young. But his face, with its rolling eyes and foaming mouth, was distorted so that its original appearance was almost unrecognizable. There was no mistaking the body, however. It was lithe, magnificently muscled, short, broad, the epitome of the youth of the race. And it was collapsing before their eyes.

Arden made a little uncertain gesture that was pathetic in its helplessness.

"You know, Spence, this breaks me all up," he said, bitterly. "There's not a thing I can do for him. I'm no more use to the poor boy in his last moments than, than—the howling camp dogs. It's the fourth since the ice went. How many more? It was the same last spring. And the year before that. Six, eight, a dozen cases. You can't tell. It's the same time each year. Spring. Why? In thirty years I haven't seen it before. Think of it. Homicide! That boy was a killer! The same as they all are, when this madness comes. If you hadn't got him in the leg and brought him down, those horrible weapons you've got there would have been responsible for many innocent lives. And likely enough women and kiddies. It's the newness of it. The violence. The suddenness. And always it's the youngsters who have been out working or hunting the previous summer. I—don't believe it's natural. I know it's not."

Spence's eyes narrowed. A quick look flashed into the other's face.

"How d'you mean—not natural?" he asked, sharply.

The missionary spread out his hands.

"I don't—know," he sighed helplessly.

"Maybe it's a sort of Spring craziness."

Arden's grey eyes flashed.

"You think that?" Then the grey head shook violently. "You don't, Eden. You think like I do. It's not—natural. You know it, too. I tell you this craziness has got my nerves. So has the other. The 'fly,' as these poor souls call it. There's the 'fly' plague thicker in camp this year than ever before. And that, too, started only three years back. When you came. We thought small-pox. But it's not. I know small-pox. This kills every time. This 'fly.' Just the same as the—madness. What does it mean?"

"Is there relation between the two?"

The missionary watching the dying man on the ground, shook his head sadly.

"I don't know what to think. But we need help. Medical help. And the sooner you get it the better," he added.

Then he pointed.

"He's—gone," he said.

. . . . .

The scene had undergone complete transformation. The two white men were no longer alone. And when the missionary and Spence rose from releasing the bonds which held the dead man, they found themselves surrounded by a throng of chattering, brown-skinned creatures ready to do their duty by their dead kinsman. They were there, too, to satisfy a curiosity in which all their superstitious dread was completely submerged. But the gathering was mostly of squaws, and children, and a few very old men.

Arden flung the ropes aside. And as he did so Andrew Kenyon and June made their way through the crowd.

The missionary gave them no heed. But Spence greeted with a friendly nod.

"Back?" he said, and turned again to the dead Indian.

June came to his side. She touched the arm of his uniform pea-jacket.

"Another?" she asked, in a tone in which Spence recognized her anxiety.

He glanced round into the vivid blue of eyes raised appealingly.

"The fourth since Spring," he said, shortly.

June pointed at the wounded leg.

"The same? Always the same. He had to be shot down like a—a crazy camp dog?"

Spence nodded.

"Yes. I just got him in time. He came down at the third shot." Then he held out his weapons for Andrew Kenyon's inspection. "Get a look at 'em," he said.

Kenyon took the hatchet and knife, and eyed the ugly blades. Then he blew a low whistle.

"It's lucky," was all he said. Then he looked at the

women and children about him, and his gaze came again to the weapons.

Spence took them back. His square features were grim.

"Lucky?" he said.

Then he stood a moment watching the little missionary who was straightening out the dead body in the gentle fashion he might have used had it been a child of his own body. Then he went on quietly.

"Yes. It was lucky. So lucky I just daren't think what would have happened to some of these," pointing at the brown-skinned crowd, "if I'd failed. We were in one of the lodges doping a case of 'fly.' Arden and I. We were through. We'd just crawled out in time to see that boy break out. He came along our way shouting blue murder and flourishing his weapons. There wasn't any sort of doubt. He was stark crazy. And, as usual, it was up to me. I pulled and got him at my third. But only just in time. He was heading for old man O-Kuk, like a hound unleashed. The crowd started to yell, and collected the old man and beat it for the boats. I got the poor devil below the knee and broke the bone. It brought him down. Then——"

He gestured and ceased speaking. There was nothing more to tell.

Kenyon made no comment. June had nothing to say. She was watching the missionary absorbed in the office he knew to be his.

At last he stood up. The sad old eyes glanced quickly about him, and he nodded recognition at June and her uncle. Then he turned to some of the Indians, and harangued them in their own tongue. Several at once moved off. And presently they returned bearing a bundle of seal robes. They were the dead man's property.

A few moments later the Indians bore the fur-shrouded body away. And the white folk watched its departure, listening to a queer, wild dirge which came from the tuneless throats of the following squaws.

As the procession vanished into the forest Mervyn Arden turned on his companions. His mild eyes were hot. And his drawn, lined face was working. He looked to be hurling threat at all of them, at anybody who might hear.

"I don't know, and I can't tell you," he cried, his voice strident and harsh in contrast with its usual softness. "But I tell you that poor boy was murdered. I know it just as sure as I'm standing right here. That crazy madness isn't any disease. It's murder. I know. And I'm going to find out. And some one's going to pay. I've worked for these poor children for thirty years. And now I just got to stand around while some one murders them."

CHAPTER III

SKEETS TELLS HIS STORY

Mervyn Arden was a simple creature who had never found soul-peace in the civilization to which he was born. In his callow youth the call had been with him, fretting, urging. But it was not until the Mission Authority at Keewin, on the shores of Hudson's Bay, decided to open a post in the unmapped territory of Green Lake that his yearning found satisfaction.

Thirty years! Surely, as things count in human life, thirty years was something approaching a life's completed labour. But Mervyn Arden had no thought of time, or rest. His Mission was his whole life. He never paused to reflect on achievement. He only considered the daily task and its adequate completion. His whole purpose was the spiritual and bodily help he could give to his dusky children.

And the Indians had inevitably reacted. To them Mervyn Arden was a little grey god whose beneficence far outstripped that of their own ancient gods in their influence upon their barren lives.

It was little wonder, then, that the man's trouble was intensely real at the close of a day of heartbreak.

He had just returned to his Mission from his burial of the dead crazy man. And, in his grief, he turned again to the thoughts which had inspired his passionate denunciation at the moment of the Indian's death. He tried to review the situation in the light of calm reason, and only achieved the conviction that his confidence, his fortitude were rapidly wearing threadbare. If the terrible dementia he had

witnessed that day were to be traced to any natural cause, then all his instinct and reason were at fault.

Year in, year out, the Caribou-eaters lived the simple, hardy life of their forbears. And, in consequence, had always known sturdy health. In the open season they fished and hunted, eating when food was plenty and enduring when their luck and skill were at fault. Then for recreation they always had the old pastime of their inter-tribal feuds which they prosecuted whole-heartedly. When winter closed down, and the world froze to the bone, they packed up their summer teepees and passed a slumberous winter in snow igloos, relieving its monotony with occasional food-hunting expeditions. It had always been so—until some four years back.

This was the point in time to which the missionary's mind always reverted. Four years ago the man, Buck Hacket, a white pelt-hunter, who lived farther north, beyond the Gateway, paid one of his extremely rare visits to the settlement on Green Lake. "Bucket," as everyone called him, was a well-known figure from the Gateway right away south to Vannie Smith's, the trader, on Bluff Lake. But he rarely paused at the Caribou-eater settlement, and ignored Mervyn Arden's Mission altogether. On this occasion he came to the landing, tied up, and went straight up to the headman, O-Kuk, and spent several hours in palaver with him.

But Mervyn Arden knew of his arrival, and was interested. Nor was he slow in setting about learning the meaning of that palaver. O-Kuk had told him at once.

Bucket wanted hunters. He wanted young men to work for him who could be trusted to keep the secret of his hunting grounds. He told O-Kuk there were certain difficult regions north where foxes abounded in such numbers that, single-handed, he was losing tremendous trade. They were magnificent silver foxes. And there were many, many black foxes which were well-nigh worth their own weight in gold.

He spoke with great fairness. He offered payment in trade for work—and secrecy. And he promised it should be trade such as the Caribou-eaters had never known before. It would take the form of guns, ammunition, tobacco, and all the hundred and one things of food and clothing beloved by the squaws.

He wanted twenty young men the first year. And he wanted them before the rivers froze, and the winter storms swept down from the Pole. The young men would remain with him until the following fall. Then they would return to their squaws laden with their spoils, and would be replaced by a fresh outfit whose numbers might be greater according to the results of his experiment.

Arden had approved. He had seen no reason to do otherwise. Bucket's reputation was well-known. As a white man he had no great standing. But as a pelt hunter he had a reputation even amongst the Indians who understood. It was known that his past was not altogether savoury, and that he drank heavily. But Arden knew well enough that most of the white men who hid themselves north of 60° suffered from similar shortcomings.

To him the whole proposition looked good for his Indians. It would surely help in their general uplift. And it would be quite easy for him to see that none of Bucket's alcoholism infected them. So the arrangement was ratified with the single regret that in its making Bucket had seen fit to avoid the Mission, and all it stood for.

At the end of the year Bucket proved as good as his promise. The following fall the twenty men returned laden with such wealth of booty that the settlement was nearly set stampeding to join him. Arden was delighted, and felt that he had been a good deal less than just to the trapper. For the second year Bucket wanted double the number of men. And such was the rush to enroll that it devolved on the missionary to join O-Kuk in their selection.

It was the spring following the first return that the blow fell. Six of the returned men suddenly went down with a

malignant disease. It was a sickness which Arden thought must be small-pox. And every one of the six died within two weeks.

This onslaught staggered the little missionary and turned all his delight into doubt and grief. But he was not the man to sit down under it. It stirred his fighting spirit, and he decided to question the returned men and their squaws.

But here he came up against Bucket's bond of secrecy, and the Indian's natural bent in that direction. The moment he attempted to question he was confronted by a barrier of cold silence. The best he got was an admission from O-Kuk himself. The aged creature admitted that the men in the late summer had had to contend with a terrible fly that was worse than any mosquito.

It was that admission which awakened the missionary to a curious anachronism in Bucket's transaction. These men were engaged to trap furs. Well, as neither Indians nor white trappers ever take furs in their summer coats, what was the work of these Indians in the summer fly time ?

Just after the six dead had been disposed of in the forest cemetery the second blow fell. It was the first attack of homicidal mania. It was the first of its kind ever known in the settlement, and the whole community was unprepared. The result was an appalling disaster. Before the terror-stricken Indians could drive their courage to the point of slaying the murdering, demented creature, twenty innocent lives fell victims to his savage onslaught. And again it was one of Bucket's returned men.

It was this episode that brought Corporal Eden Spence upon the scene. At his wits' end Mervyn Arden had dispatched a panic messenger to the south, to the police headquarters at Fort Marie on Lake Athaba, begging for assistance. Spence was the result. He came on a patrol only. But he came, and eventually established a new police post on the lake.

That was three years ago. Since then each year both the

fly disease and the outbreaks of insanity had grown in frequency and severity of attack. They had grown to the proportions of an annual scourge.

Mervyn Arden and Corporal Spence had done their best. They nursed the sick and dealt with each case of insanity as best they were able. They reported for advice, and carried on. But they were helpless before the onslaughts.

After the first and second outbreaks they had taken a swift decision. This work for Bucket must be looked into. It must even cease. So the man was interviewed, and the whole thing laid before him. Bucket came at once to the Mission at Corporal Spence's invitation.

He came, a lean, tall, fair-haired man of perhaps thirty-five. He was clean-shaven, and pale-eyed, with the manner and speech of a university man, a man bred in the best that civilization could offer. He was clad in the characteristic manner of his calling, he wore buckskin from head to foot, and the stout, fur-lined pea-jacket which leaves its comforted wearer with perfect freedom of movement. And the missionary was impressed with the man's evident concern and apparent sincerity of purpose.

Mervyn Arden placed the position before Bucket with the eloquence inspired by his feelings. Corporal Spence supported him in his more official manner. Bucket did not wait for the final ultimatum.

"You don't need to go further, Mr Arden," he said earnestly, in smooth, even tones, that were singularly colourless. "I'll cancel my arrangement with old man O-Kuk right away. That's what you both want, arguing that this trouble comes out of the work they're doing for me. I just wouldn't have it on my conscience, and that's a fact. This 'fly' is a new one on me. It's something I haven't seen anywhere around. But it's true there's parts of the hill country where you get a pretty bad fly—yes, worse than the skitters. But I've been no worse than badly chewed. And I don't see why these neches get this appalling sickness from it. Still, you never know. Their blood's different

from ours. As for the other, I just can't account for it anyway."

The man's concern seemed so very sincere that both Spence and the missionary were more than satisfied. But Arden put his instant question.

"What," he asked, "is the work required of the Indians when the winter pelt season's closed?"

Spence saw the ill-reputed trapper's flicker of an eyelid. But that was all. The man smiled in a pallid way.

"See right here, Mr Arden," he said, with a gesture conveying frankness. "I want to help you all I know. I know the work you folks are doing, and I'd say that I feel good there are such men as you about. But I'm going to ask you to take a poor darn trapper man on trust. You know the toughness of our life. You know the pretty ghastly struggle it is to dip a living out of this Barren world. My hunting grounds, and the work I do, are secrets an Inquisition couldn't get out of me. I just daren't part with 'em. They're all that's standing between me and a quick exit from life. I just can't tell you what you ask, that's all. But if I can't tell you that I can do the other. I can quit using those neches. And I'm going to. Do you want fairer? You can't. I'll go back to my lone game, and just pick up pelts from the neches that feel like making trade with me. Is that sufficient? Does that suit? If this trouble comes from my hunting grounds that should end it."

The man's sacrifice did not fail in its appeal. It carried conviction even to the more sophisticated Spence. And when the man finally took his departure, after visiting O-Kuk, and refusing further to employ the Indians, and they saw the mists about the Gateway swallow him up, Bucket's stock had certainly risen by at least one hundred per cent.

Arden's joy and Spence's satisfaction were short-lived, however. Bucket stood by the letter of his promise. But the missionary had not taken the Indians into his considera-

tion. They had handled Bucket's trade, and they wanted more. So the fall saw another exodus of young men from the settlement. They went. And ultimately they returned. Of their own initiative they had gone to the hunting grounds, and the trade they brought back told Arden the rest.

Bucket's stock promptly deteriorated when Spence drew his obvious conclusion.

"That feller's tough," he had said. "He's played us for fools and got away with it. When he made that promise to refuse to use the neches he had their measure good. They'd handled his trade and wanted more. Oh, no," he added, bitterly, "he's not employing them. And he won't. He knows we could send a police outfit to clear him right out. But these poor darn fools of their own crazy greed go to his hunting grounds and trade their catch with him. We're beat by that tow-headed, smooth-tongued bum."

And so, for three years the trouble had gone on. Each year the Indians returned in the fall laden with the trade they loved, and infected by the scourge that was decimating their numbers. But even that was not the whole disaster as the missionary saw it.

The nature of his Indians was changing, had already changed! From simple children of the wilderness they had reacted in a fashion that well-nigh broke the little man's heart. They had become fierce, ruthless, and incredibly unapproachable. They warred amongst themselves. They maltreated their old people. They drove their squaws like cattle. But most deplorable of all, to the missionary, was the wanton fashion in which each season, without excuse or provocation, they set out on a war-trail, and abandoned all their peaceful occupations.

As Mervyn Arden sat on the edge of his sleeping bunk, watching the movements of his man, Skeets, as he prepared the evening meal, his dejection was profound. There were sixty cases of 'fly' now in the settlement. And this Spring he had just buried the fourth case of that—other. How

many more cases would there be in the next month or so. How long would it be before his life's work was ruined? And the remnant of his Indians would be wiped out?

The optimism, the confidence of the man had been shocked. His faith had been well-nigh shattered. Was it wonder that in reaction suspicion had leapt and found fruitful soil in which to grow? It was the very natural result in a man of the missionary's temperament. He had convinced himself that something dire in its evil was at work. And he knew that its source was Bucket.

For a long time he sat there brooding in a sort of desperate silence. But when Skeets set the cooked food on the table and invited him to eat, all restraint fell from him. Instead of eating he paced the room and poured out the distress he could not longer keep to himself.

Skeets listened. The tide of his master's grief was something he had no power to stem. And as the whiteman went on, there crept into the black, watchful eyes, a look of real apprehension. This was succeeded by deep-throated, guttural mutterings. Then, in truly Indian fashion, Skeets began to make med'cine, and his eyes rolled.

It was the sight of this that made the missionary pull himself together. He saw those outward signs of the poor creature's distress. So he dismissed him for the night, and turned to his supper.

Later he prepared for his blankets. He had shed his outer garments, and now stood hopelessly contemplating the mean surroundings of his home. The whole thing he told himself was in vain!

Thirty years! A life's work wasted. Disaster! What could he do? Where was help? There was none. There —Suddenly, the little man dropped to his knees at his bedside. And the manner of it had that simplicity which told of his faith, and the passing of his storm.

That night, as he lay in his blankets, he spent an hour writing in his red-bound diary. And after that he slept.

. . . . . .

The missionary was wide awake. He had been shocked into wakefulness. It was dawn. And in his shabby woollen underclothing he was sitting on his bunkside listening—listening intently.

Sounds came to him in noisy confusion. Many sounds. But the only thing he really heard was the steady beat of a drum that was entirely without resonance.

He knew it. There could be no doubt. And as the door of the hut was pushed open, and the broad, squat figure of Skeets appeared, Mervyn Arden was hastily pulling on his well-worn breeches.

There was no need of any verbal question. Skeets replied to the missionary's glance of inquiry at once.

"Him mak war trail!" he said, briefly.

The missionary's gaze frowned his mild censure.

"You never warned me," he chided. "You knew, and did not say. Why?"

The Indian's eyes rolled this way and that. His heavily muscled body swayed curiously as its weight passed from one foot to the other.

"Skeets not know 'em," he muttered.

"But they take days getting ready?" the other protested.

The Indian shook his flat head.

"Him go," he declared emphatically. "Him come by night. Yes. Him all come quick. Indian man on river. Him say all mans Yellow Knife mak so big war. Yes."

The missionary pulled on his long boots with their many patches, and snatched up his dusty hat.

"Make food," he ordered sharply. "I go see O-Kuk. Maybe I can make them quit this craziness."

Skeets's eyes dulled.

"You not stop 'um craziness," he said. "All mans gone—quick."

But the other had gone. And Skeets had spoken only to the door as it slammed behind him.

. . . . .

Skeets was at the stove when the missionary returned. He had been ordered to make food. His sidelong glance, half-fearful, half-anxious, took in the little grey figure as it flung itself to a seat on the tumbled blankets.

There was no sound but of the splutter of cooking, and the dead beats of the distant drum. Skeets moved noiselessly. But his work was done with less than his usual skill. He was agitated. He was agitated to a point where distress and superstitious dread came into mortal conflict. He was driving himself to a last desperate decision. His conflict had begun the evening before. It had gone on during the whole of a long, wakeful night.

Suddenly the missionary's voice came almost harshly.

"Merciful God!" he cried. "Can I never stop these crazy creatures? Will they never learn? Are they mad? Mad, too? And that wretched O-Kuk. He's the maddest of them all."

It was a burst of impotent irritation the little man could not restrain. And it had an amazing result.

Skeets turned from his stove. He swung about almost violently. His broad face was working. His eyes showed white all round their moving pupils. If he had been built that way the sweat of terror must have stood out on his forehead. He gestured with large hands that held cooking utensils.

"You say him. This—mad!" he cried, in his deep, guttural voice. "Skeets know him. He think mush. Oh, yes."

Arden turned. He looked into the dark face with its framing of black hair. It was rather like the searching inquiry of some aged bird with an eye alertly cocked.

"You know him. This—mad?" he said. "What do you know?" he asked sharply.

Skeets waved his cooking utensils in his agitation.

"So," he muttered. "I know him all. This thing. This 'fly.' Oh, yes. This—mad. That kill 'um all man's dead. Skeets know 'um."

Arden stood up. He left the bedside and came a step towards the Indian. The man's wild eyes were shining with a deep fire that told of consuming excitement. He laid a hand that shook on one of the arms of the agitated creature.

"You know?" he reiterated. "This madness?"

The touch of his master's hand did more for the Indian than could any word of comfort. His eyes steadied. The flat head wagged in urgent assent.

"I tell 'um all this thing now, good boss," he said, a little desperately. "I think mush. So I tell. Last night, no. Last night Skeets big coward. This day him brave, big man. Him not scare lak all 'um mans Indian mad fool. No. Big man. Brave."

Mervyn Arden drew a deep breath that was more eloquent than words. Skeets knew. Skeets would tell of—this madness.

"Tell me, Skeets," he said, holding himself firmly. Then he added: "And you don't need to fear a thing."

Skeets glanced this way and that. His eyes sought the door to discover it tight shut. They sought the window. That, too, was closed. Then he hung his head like a troubled school child.

"I know 'um," he said heavily, almost hopelessly. "All Indian mans known 'um. Bad Spirit. Him all kill up mans who—say."

Arden's eyes warmed. His thin cheeks wreathed into a disdainful smile.

"No!" he said. "No Bad Spirit will kill Skeets." He tapped his own narrow chest. "I say that."

Skeets visibly stiffened. He looked steadily into his master's eyes and his head wagged at his words.

They stood there, these two, while the distant drum pounded somewhere away back in the settlement. But neither heeded it. Skeets rumbled on in his halting version of the white man's tongue. And once he had begun his story, the compelling eyes of his urgent master refused to release him till his task was complete.

He told his story from end to end at heavy cost to himself. And when he had finished the missionary raised an approving hand, and gripped his heavily muscled shoulder in a caress which the poor fellow understood.

"Good, my Skeets," he said. "Now, we shall see. Now, we shall have no more sickness. The old oomiak. You know him? Take him on a creek where no one may see. And make him ready. I'll fix my food. You go now, while they're all too crazy to heed. We go to-night."

Arden watched the man as he shuffled heavily to the door. With one hand on the fastening Skeets turned.

"Mak ready—now?" he asked, in a final hope of dissuading.

The missionary nodded. A moment later the door closed on the lumbering creature and Arden knew at what a cost the man's story had been told.

But his food did not claim the missionary. He remained where the Indian had left him. He knew. He was by no means blinded by his own confidence. There was danger. Grave danger in the thing he intended. But he knew now he could save his foolish, simple children. And no personal danger should deter him.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME-COMING OF MERVYN ARDEN

It was three weeks since Corporal Spence and the missionary had saved the settlement from the disaster of the insane Indian. Nor had it been a time of ease or satisfaction to the policeman. On the contrary, Spence was seriously disquieted.

Spence was a man of steady energy and deliberate resolve. His was not the energy of high nervous tension, but the strength of a man who knows his work and desires to do it at all times, and under every condition. He possessed little enough of the missionary's sympathy for the Indians. But he accepted their shepherding as a large part of his work, and did it with all the thoroughness of which he was capable.

Spence's disquiet now, however, had assumed the nature of a nightmare. It had begun the day following the episode of the crazy Indian. First had come the sudden war trail of the Indians. That had occurred in the night. And they were far afield before he was aware of the outbreak. His immediate duty, of course, was to pursue, to stop them, and turn them back at any cost. He knew from long experience all that would involve. But, nevertheless, he would undoubtedly have set out on the instant but for the urgent claims of the settlement itself.

The " fly " scourge had suddenly quickened. Each day saw a death, and sometimes two. Then there were the necessary burials. But infinitely more disturbing was the simultaneous development of that other. In the past three weeks there had been fresh cases of dementia. Three times

had he had to secure a homicidal maniac and witness his hideous death. Nor, in any of these cases had he had the same luck in saving innocent lives.

Bad as these things were, the preoccupation and anxiety of them was not the full or even main source of Spence's disquiet. It was something else, something for which, search as he would, he could find no reasonable explanation.

Mervyn Arden and his Indian, Skeets, had disappeared!

He had made the discovery on the day following the outbreak of the Indians. And it was this that had held him to his post. He had visited the Mission in the morning only to find it shut up, sealed, deserted. The missionary had gone. So had his man. So had his boat. There was not a sign or trace. No word. No letter.

Arden and he were friends. Good friends, held by the bond of their common work. In all his association with Green Lake the missionary had never embarked on any unusual course without some explanation of it to his associate. He had certainly never left his Mission without asking Spence to look after things in his absence. What, then, was the meaning of this sudden departure from all custom between them? The man's going meant that he, Spence, was pinned down to the settlement, and that routine policework must, for the time being, be abandoned.

Spence's imagination completely failed him. The mystery of Arden's going was quite beyond him. He could think of no emergency that could demand such hurried, secret departure. And as time went on, and the missionary did not return, his puzzlement developed into serious alarm, not untouched with a sense of grievance.

For himself he knew he should be out on the trail of the Indians. That was his clear duty, the neglect of which might very easily get him into serious trouble at headquarters. Then he intended to send Ambuk, his half-breed scout, or Suliman, his Indian riverman, for medical assistance to headquarters. He could do neither. Alone, and with disease rampant in the settlement, he could spare neither of his men.

It was aggravating as well as disheartening. For three weeks now he had been forced to act the parts of funeral furnisher, hospital attendant, cemetery chaplain and even coroner. And the thought of it all stirred him to impotent revolt against the whole futile process of civilization.

Now, he and Ambuk were down at the lake shore. The smoke of a smudge-fire was lolling heavily across them. Its fumes drove the mosquitoes and fierce flies headlong, and made life possible. A heat haze hung over the pleasantly lapping waters of the lake, and, far away to the northward, the Gateway was no better than an indistinct blur on the horizon. The noon sun was torrid.

The waterside was entirely deserted. A few odd craft lay half in and half out of the water. But they were mostly derelicts left behind by the Indian warriors. The only other living soul visible was where June Kenyon's bare, vivid head lit the grey stone backing of the Fort with a warm patch of colour. The hush was profound. Even the canine chorus of the camp was silent.

The half-breed Ambuk was crouching under the motor patrol boat, which had been taken from the water and set up on trestles of sapling spruce. He was surrounded by cans of all shapes and sizes containing the tar which Suliman provided from the natural tar sands a mile or so further along the lake shore. He was at work with a smearer on the boat's bottom. But his enthusiasm was such that he, himself, was well-nigh submerged in the viscous liquid.

Spence was overhauling the vessel's engine. He was at great pains. That little machine meant so much to him amongst the turbulent rapids and surging freshet on the big river. Then it was his only hope pursuing the numberless marshy tributaries which scored the back country of the Barrens.

At last Spence flung his grease-rag and spanner aside and leant himself against the stout beam of the boat, and filled his pipe. He stood frowning over at the deserted Mission, whose problem he would have given worlds to be able to solve.

He lit his pipe, and thoughtfully pinched out the flaming match. Then, with an irritated hunch of his broad shoulders, he turned and gazed at the smoke spirals rising above the settlement. Presently the patch of colour on the terrace of the Fort came into his focus, and he gazed at the pretty figure of the girl standing there. His irritation passed, and a smile crept into his eyes. He liked June Kenyon. She was very attractive, and not a little mysterious. But Spence had no thought of her other than as an attractive companion in his banishment from the world's pleasant places. He knew she was not of his world, besides——

A splash of tar came to rest on the back of the hand that held his pipe.

"You priceless mutton!" he shouted down at the man under the boat. "The boat. Not the landscape, you idiot! You set that darn stuff just where it's needed, or I'll club you till you don't know tar from syrup."

Spence seized his grease-rag and wiped his blackened hand. And a tar-blotched face peered out grinning from under the boat. It was then the policeman realized the man's industrious frenzy. He was squatting under an inky rainstorm.

"For the Lord's sake!" he cried, pointing with vast amusement.

He stood back to get a better view.

"Say, get a look at that," he went on. "If you've fixed the old boat the way you're fixed it's sure watertight. Man, you look like an image with the black plague. Here, crawl out from under. We'll turn her up so you can fix her right. Say!"

Ambuk obeyed. He stood up a lean, muscular creature in police overalls. He grinned amiably through his tar, and Spence passed him a grease-rag.

"Clean your self," he ordered curtly.

But the result was disastrous. Ambuk smeared the tar into a comprehensive smudge, and Spence laughed outright.

"Say, quit it while you can see," he cried. "And get a holt on the boat."

A few moments later the boat was bottom up and Ambuk was again flourishing his smearer.

"We go south, boss?" the half-breed asked. "Big trip to the Fort."

Spence watched the smearer apprehensively.

"We can't—yet," he said. "Looks like you'll have to make it when the time comes. That is," he added with a grin, "if you ever get that darn face right for Inspector Ferrers to look at."

Ambuk promptly re-sought the grease-rag which he oiled profusely.

"We wait for boss Arden?" he said between wipes. "He's not got back."

"That's so," Spence agreed. "I can't quit here. Maybe there'll be more folks to bury. Maybe we'll get another dose of craziness. Then there's those darn fools out after—Hullo!"

Spence swung about facing back at the settlement. Ambuk gripped his grease-rag and held it still. Both were eyeing the woods where the smoke rose up on the still air. June Kenyon, too, had been startled. She had run to the hither end of the terrace. A low, mournful, tuneless dirge had broken up the noon hush.

"Something amiss!"

Spence spoke sharply. Ambuk made no reply. And the tuneless dirge rose and fell in queer cadence. It was wild and savage, but profound in its significance.

Suddenly Ambuk flung out an inordinately long arm pointing. He was pointing at the bush that grew thick about the three Mission buildings. Spence turned. For awhile he could see nothing unusual. Then he became aware of movement through the scrub.

It was a crowd slowly advancing. Indians; and mostly squaws. It was the squaws whose shrill voices intoned the dismal chant. They were small creatures whose lack of

height was made up for in breadth. And most of them had infants slung at their backs. They had cleared the bush and were heading for the smallest of the three Mission huts.

"Death!"

It was Ambuk who spoke.

But Spence waited for no more. He was off on the run, with Ambuk on his heels. The Mission! Death! Whose?

June had left the terrace. She, too, was running.

• • • • •

Outside Mervyn Arden's humble quarters, without cessation, without any variation in its drear, the dirge of the mourning Indians went on. Savage, tuneless, wild, it nevertheless told of deep human feeling. It told of grief, of yearning. It told of every sad emotion and human trouble without pretence.

Inside the hut was a deathly silence. The only sound was of shuffling movement, and the crackle and roar of a newly lit stove.

Mervyn Arden was home. He was stretched out on his own grass-filled palliasse, just as kindly brown hands had laid him there.

It was truly a woeful homecoming. The man was sick to death. And only in the faint, uneasy rise and fall of his sunken chest was displayed the flicker of the life which he had long since dedicated to the Indians. He was alive. But that was all. And, to the two men stooping over him it looked to be the last weary struggle dragging out the few remaining hours of his self-sacrificing life.

The deep, sunken eyes were hidden. The grey head was without movement, or any appearance of life. It was raised. It was set up on his coarse pillow as though those who had placed him there thought he might awaken. An ugly scalp wound started at the temple and lost itself in the blood-matted hair. His clothing was soaked and dishevelled. But all those things were as nothing in the minds of those gazing on him when compared with that other. Face, hands, arms,

chest, wherever the bare flesh was visible his skin was blotched with inflamed pustules. He looked to be in the last stages of malignant disease.

Spence bestirred. He reached for and drew up a covering blanket. Then he stood up, and presently turned away. Andrew Kenyon left the bedside, too. They were helpless. And both knew it.

June Kenyon, crouching before the stove, which her woman's thought had prompted her to light, stood up at their approach. She wanted to speak. To ask. But she did neither. Nor did she even so much as glance over at the bed. She had already seen. And she wanted to try and remember only the clean, kindly, wholesome little man they had all loved and revered.

Instead of her questions she turned in the opposite direction. It was where Ambuk, with due sense of his office, was standing a sort of sentry over the dead body of the Indian, Skeets. It was sprawled on the ground literally shot to pieces.

June turned from the sickening sight. Her anxious eyes were raised to the policeman's face.

"Can I do—anything? Anything at all?" she appealed. Her hands clasped. "Tell me. I'm ready to do just—anything."

Spence pondered the stove.

"Not a thing, Miss June," he said at last, a little desperately. "It's the same. Always the same. We've tried all we know for the others, and—failed. We shall try for him and—fail."

"It's—the 'fly'?"

The girl's eyes were full of tearful grief.

"Yes," he said. "It's—the 'fly'."

"And—murder."

Andrew Kenyon pointed back at the scarred head. Spence looked down at the shattered Skeets.

June watched the two men and was glad of them. They were both strong. They were both ready to act. How?

Spence she knew would do his duty, without pity or mercy for any criminal that came into his hands. Uncle Andy? She felt comforted when she remembered the way he had once warned her they were no "quitters."

Spence turned to June and the feeling had gone from his voice.

"Miss June," he said, "I want you to go right now. I want you to quit at once, and not come near this shack again. I want both you folks to quit and leave me to it all. I'm used to it," he went on with a sigh. "I've been burying them weeks. It's best that way. You see, we don't know about this 'fly.' We don't reckon it's infectious, but we don't know. That poor little feller is going to die. That's about all I'm sure of. Maybe it'll be hours. Maybe days. Anyway, I can't stand for the risk of you folks. He's my job. And I'll do all I know. I've got to get his wet clothes off him now, and set him as comfortable as maybe. So—And maybe, Miss June, you'll have a pot of hot soup fixed in your kitchen. That'll help me warm his sick body."

June was all for protest. Her impulse was for flat refusal. Her woman's soul rebelled at the thought of one she had loved and revered in life being left in his extremity. But she knew Spence was right. She further knew he would brook no refusal. Her presence would serve to intensify his anxiety. And that must not be. But she laid an appealing hand on his arm.

"But you'll send word—if—if—"

Spence patted the girl's brown hand gently.

"Sure I will," he said. "And thanks for going—now."

June had no alternative. She drew her hand away. And, as she passed out of the hut, she still was without the courage to look back at the bed.

Spence sighed his relief as the door closed behind her.

"Thank God she's out of—danger," he said.

But Andrew Kenyon snorted.

"Danger?" he cried scornfully. "Danger? Do you think that kid's worried for danger? Say, boy, you don't

know her. You don't know either of us," he went on, a surge of strong feeling driving him. "We both loved that little grey man. We're both crazy to help him. We want to help you. Oh, I know. You're scared that sickness'll get the kid. Get us. What about yourself? Can't my fool body stand up to anything yours can? Of course. You don't have to be scared that way for us, for me. We're both out to take every chance. We're out for——"

"You're out for——?"

Spence was smiling into Kenyon's eager eyes as he broke off. But his smiling urge only encountered a rueful shake of the head.

"It don't matter what we're out for," Kenyon said awkwardly. Then he forgot his embarrassment. "But there's been murder done, Spence. Look at Skeets. Shot to pieces. And the same hand reckoned to do Arden up. Where've they been? Where did the neches get hold of them? Do you know? Have you a notion? Oh, I know it's your job. But that little feller's got a holt on us. I want to help. Can't you let me help? Won't you?"

"No."

Spence spoke almost sharply. And in face of the flat refusal Kenyon stared blankly. Then his big face hardened.

"Why?" he asked, and his manner was icy.

But Spence flung out a hand. And his whole manner changed.

"No, Kenyon," he said, but in a tone of cordiality. "I just can't let you. I—daren't. I wouldn't have your niece within a mile of this disease. Look at it, and—think. I've packed her off. Now you must go. I've got to fix him dry. And to see that wound. I've got to look into that," he went on, indicating the dead Indian. "Then I've got to get after those who found them and toted them in. And when I'm through I'll come right along to you. And if there's a thing to do I'll ask, and be glad to get, your help. I'll be along to-night."

CHAPTER V

AT NIGHT

The aged Fort had all the grimness of some mouldering, mediæval castle. But it possessed none of the picturesqueness which age usually affords. It was bald, low and monstrously solid. It was built entirely of massive stone slabs, even to its roof. And these were no more than crudely chiselled. Furthermore, every interstice seemed to be filled with a rank growth of lichen whose dank reek added something to the general air of depression.

The terraced front, overlooking the lake, gave it something of the appearance of an Arab fortress set up in the heart of an African desert. Its high square face was rigid, angular and set. Then there was its row of slit-like openings, which once, undoubtedly, had been defensive emplacements. Now they were filled with glazed window framings. A high rugged stone archway gave on to a central courtyard.

The building looked just that for which it had obviously been intended. A hastily set up, but infinitely stout defence against any and every sort of attack which might be hurled upon it out of its surrounding of wilderness.

Corporal Spence had no great interest for this ugly monument at any time. And just now, as he hastily made his way towards its main entrance to fulfil his promise of the morning, he gave it no heed whatever.

It was very late. As time counted it was night. But the sun was still above the horizon, sprawling its lengthening shadows. It was that time of year when darkness was inconsiderable, and soon would have no reign at all.

Wadda Charlie was waiting for him. He met the policeman as he passed through the archway. A brief word, and the visitor was crossing the shadowed courtyard in the direction of the apartment which was the Kenyon's one living room.

Wadda Charlie, as major-domo, had an air that never failed to amuse Corporal Spence. He knew that neither June nor her uncle were responsible for it. It was just an expression of the man's little personal vanity. Charlie, although a half-breed, had been in domestic service all his life. And he took pride in the fact. In the daytime, engaged on ordinary chores, or on the river, he wore the garb common to all men of the north. But at night, fulfilling his normal office, it was different. He donned his official air when he donned his black trousers and black alpaca coat.

Spence was familiar enough with the living room in the Fort to need no conducting thither. But Wadda Charlie would not yield his duty for anyone. When the man had noiselessly departed through the curtained doorway Spence glanced about him.

It was a rather wonderful thing the Kenyons had done. The Fort had been no better than a ruin when they first came to it. Much of it was still a ruin. But the part which they had decided to occupy, at infinite pains and lavish expenditure, had been transformed and brought to a state of comfort such as, in the best of its old days, the place had probably never known.

The living-room was long and narrow, and high-roofed. It had probably served its original owners as a banqueting hall or an armoury. It occupied nearly the whole of the south side of the building, and two of its walls were the main outer walls of the Fort itself.

These walls were of amazing thickness. They were strongly cemented, too. And the great stones were even additionally bonded by wrought iron clamps that must have been forged on the spot. It was the window embrasures that revealed the immense thickness of the walls. They formed recesses

that were almost passages more than ten feet in length. As a result, the combined effort of all the many windows failed to provide the room with better than twilight.

The harshness of the walls had been hidden under cheerful hangings. And these formed their only decoration. The slab stone flooring had been similarly treated. It was strewn with thick rugs and furs just as they came from the hands of the Indians who trapped them. In the centre of the room stood a vast wood stove which was kept burning the year round in defence against the sepulchral chill which the stone walls created. For the rest there were lounging chairs, a rocker or two, several tables, a desk, and the hundred and one details of comfort dear to the heart of people of culture.

Spence had watched the development of it all from the start. And often enough, at sight of the unloading at the landing of the heavy cargoes, laboriously brought up from the far shores of Hudson's Bay, he had wondered at the enormous cost of it all. Not once but many times, too, since then, he had sought to solve the riddle of the presence on the lake of people who so obviously had no real place outside the bounds of civilization.

June came to him at once. And as Spence beheld her something of the weariness of a day of grievous labour seemed to fall from him.

It was the girl's intense femininity here within her own home. The contrast with her mannish equipment on the trail was almost magical. She was clad in a soft, black, modish frock, low enough at the neck to reveal the dazzling whiteness of her gently swelling bosom. Its sleeves were of the briefest, and displayed the shapely beauty of her finely muscled arms. But it was the crowning glory of the girl's brilliant hair and the smiling beauty of her fine eyes that made Spence forget his weariness. June was always a figure to attract. But here, so far from the world to which she belonged, she was something infinitely more.

"I'm just through, Miss June," the policeman said, taking the hand held out to him in welcome. "It's a bit late. But

I've been on the dead jump ever since we got him. Now, I want to talk. I've got to talk. Arden and I were big friends."

"Were?"

June's alarm was instant.

"Are." Spence corrected himself.

June sighed and indicated a chair which the man promptly accepted.

"Now you can talk and rest," she said. "Tell me."

The girl possessed herself of her favourite rocker. Her daintily shod feet sought the polished rail of the stove. And Spence became aware of the silken hose which finds no man indifferent.

"Have you found out?" she asked eagerly. "Is there a lot to tell? How is he? Are you going to give us just a word of hope?"

June's frank way of looking squarely into another's eyes held the man for a moment. Then he shook his head. He turned to gaze at the far windows where the sun's last effort was hopelessly striving to reach beyond the thickness of the walls.

"Not a hope I can see," he said gloomily. "How could there be? Is there any hope for the others, when the 'fly' battens on them?" He shook his head. "No. There's no hope. The best little Christian man I've ever hit up against is surely going to die, and it makes me mad I can't save him."

June's eyes were hidden. But her grief was there without any concealment.

"I just—hoped," she said, choking back an inclination to tears.

"But I've found out things," Spence went on. "Oh, it's not a deal. But it's something. And I'm acting right away. Ambuk's on his way down to Fort Marie for help. I'm hoping for a real live doctor man. But he won't be in time to save Arden."

"You're getting more police help?"

There was a quickness in the girl's question which was not lost on the man.

"Yes," he replied. "There's going to be no more foolery, no more dallying. It's got right on top of me. Say, I wonder if you get the full meaning of the things happening around? I don't mean just—Arden. But all the rest."

June's feet left the stove rail. She sat forward and her hands clasped. They clasped tightly, and Spence saw the energy of it. Just as he became aware of the carefully manicured finger-nails.

"Better than you'll ever dream of," she said, in a low voice.

Spence's eyes narrowed. The enigma of these people rose paramount in his mind.

"And you want to help?" he said, after a thoughtful pause.

"You'll never believe how much. Both of us," June cried eagerly.

"And we're going to, Spence, if you'll use us."

It was Andrew Kenyon. His big body was disguised under well-cut tweeds. He came into the room, and crossed quickly to the stove where he faced the man in the chair.

"What's your best news?" he asked.

Spence gestured.

"There's no best news with 'fly' around."

"No."

There was a moment of tense silence. June was watching the two men. She felt it best to leave them to talk without her assistance.

Kenyon's hand went to a vest pocket. He extracted two large cigars. He dropped one into the policeman's hands. And the silence continued while the cigars were lit.

"Now."

The older man dropped his match into the stove and blew a cloud of smoke.

Spence removed his cigar.

"I just told Miss June I'd sent along down for help.

I've got to get it. But—I can't hope it'll be in time to save him."

"Then why send?'

Kenyon's response was incisive. And it came in that tone that bespoke disapproval. Spence looked into the keenly questioning grey eyes, and his own were cold.

"Arden figured there was murder around," he said. "And now I know he was right."

"But there's you and me? There's your men, and my servants? Can't we——?"

"It's police work," Spence broke in firmly.

"Ye-es." Kenyon pondered the ash of his cigar, and June watched him a little anxiously. "Where did they find him?" he asked.

But Spence ignored the question.

"You don't think it's time to get help?" he asked sharply.

"Honestly, I don't. A doctor, yes. If they just sent a smart doctor along it would all be to the good. But they'll send an officer—I expect. And likely your superior. Do you see what that means, Spence? As I see it, he'll take this post out of your hands. You'll work to his orders. You'll have to start him all fresh on everything. And when the thing's cleared up he'll take the credit. I think it's a pity."

Spence's moment of doubt passed. Kenyon's concern for him was so frankly friendly.

"Oh, they'll only send a Doc.," he smiled. "I made that right."

Her uncle's relief was obvious to June. She realized the relaxing in the set of his clean-shaven jaws. He nodded.

"Where did they pick him up?" he urged.

"It was a bunch of neches coming along down out of the hills with their winter catch," Spence replied at once. "They were on a big stream, and one I don't seem to know. I rather fancy they meant to be vague. I pressed them but got no more as to locality. Their confounded secrecy makes me sore. Anyway, I guess they were looking to make camp on some marsh backwater where there was a spruce bluff on

a patch of solid. It was there they found his old oomiak tied up. Skeets was sprawled, shot to pieces beside the remains of a camp fire. Arden was alive but unconscious, propped against the foot of a tree. He was knocked plumb out with his head wound. And when they found him he hadn't a sign of the 'fly.' They weren't going to bring them in. They were scared they'd be accused of the shooting."

"No one would accuse an Indian of shooting Mr Arden," June broke in.

"No. No Indian would have pulled a gun on him," her uncle agreed.

"Yes, that was the way I talked to them," Spence went on. "You see, I wanted all they'd tell. But it didn't make difference. They finally brought him along because he was alive, and he was Arden. And the moment they started to rush him down the 'fly' broke out on him. They reckoned there wasn't a living soul within a hundred miles to do that shooting."

Spence drew a deep breath, and gazed down the room at the windows at the far end where the last of the sunshine had finally died out. June was watching the glow of the fire through the mica sides of the stove. Andrew Kenyon struck another match. His cigar had gone out. He lit it. Then turning to an oil lamp, he removed the shade and lit that.

"It was—north-west?" he asked, without looking at the policeman.

"Yes. Bucket's hill country."

"Bucket's way!"

It was June. And her eyes were alight with quickened interest.

Kenyon blew smoke.

"I've just been up that way—two weeks," he said quietly. "I got in yesterday, as you know. I was with Bucket quite a lot. I ate several times with him. It wasn't Bucket. He's been at his place right along."

Spence stirred. He was eyeing Andrew Kenyon curiously.

"I didn't know you went up north of the Gateway," he said.

A smile hovered in June's eyes as she watched her uncle. It was affectionate, whimsical, derisive. Kenyon drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said drily. "I've been up there nosing amongst a bunch of muskeg creeks that look like a drainage system of the world's worst territory." He flashed a look at the policeman. "You can verify if you feel that way. Ask Bucket."

But Spence smiled and shook his head.

"I don't need to," he said quietly. Then his eyes lit. And, withdrawing a hand from a pocket, he held up something between finger and thumb. It was longish and shining. "I took that out of Skeets. Skeets and Arden," he went on, "were shot with the latest pattern Mauser. And I don't know a Mauser within a hundred miles of Green Lake."

"Except mine."

"Yours?"

Spence had risen from his chair. He almost leapt out of it. The two men were facing each other. And Kenyon dwarfed the policeman in spite of the latter's muscular breadth.

"Yes. The very latest pattern. Will you see it?"

It was some moments before Spence replied. Then he shook his head. But the eyes which held the civilian's were boring.

"Never mind the Mauser," he said sharply. "But I'd be glad for you to tell me why you're here, Kenyon. I'd be glad to know why you, a mining engineer, and Miss June, who belongs to a different world than Green Lake, are here making a home in a region that don't belong to any white man unless he's got something to hide. You've been here two years. You've spent rolls of money fixing your home as though you meant to stay. I know, without being told, there's nothing wrong with you. But why—why? There's a purpose. And if I've got an ounce of savee that purpose is

someway mixed up with what's happening around. Will you talk ? "

It was June who replied. And her reply came without hesitation and with a smiling, baffling ingenuousness.

" You've sheer right to ask, Corporal Spence," she admitted quickly. " And whether you like my answer or not it's the only one you can get—at present. Uncle's a mining engineer, and he's hunting secrets and I'm helping him. These Barrens are about the oldest territory in the whole world, and, that being so, we reckon they've got secrets to tell for those who can read them right. We can't tell you more. Or rather we don't intend to."

" Secrets. Yes, ugly secrets." Spence's eyes snapped, and his tone was almost vicious as he dropped the remains of his cigar into the stove.

" Yes. I think there are ugly secrets," Kenyon agreed. " And some day we mean to know how ugly." His eyes never wavered as he looked into the policeman's face. " But this is getting us no further," he went on. " I want to show you my Mauser. It's your duty to see it, since—it's still packed just as it came from the makers."

He moved from the stove to pass across to the doorway. Spence was watching him, but without a shadow of suspicion. He was just thinking. And it was not of the Mauser. He had not the least desire to see that.

It was the reply of the girl. It was the significance she had, perhaps, inadvertently put into it. Spence had no great penetration, no great mental acuteness in unravelling problems. But he had read into the girl's reply an admission that their purpose was other than the prospecting of a mining engineer.

And as Kenyon moved from behind the stove, Spence observing him thoughtfully found his gaze aligned upon a far window that stood wide open. It was only for the fraction of a second. But in that fraction the brain that was not acute in problems drove him to headlong activity. He leapt. His hand clutched on June's arm. And the girl

found herself dragged from her exposed chair, and flung to the ground in the shelter behind the stove.

"Drop for your life, man!" Spence roared at her uncle.

But it was too late. The quiet of the darkening room was crashed with an ear-splitting report. There was another. Then a third. Kenyon reeled. He staggered, and dropped under cover of the stove.

Spence charged for the curtained doorway shouting the name of Wadda Charlie as he went.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAUSER

The yellow lamplight was concentrated on one spot. The rest of the long room was shadowed. The heavy curtains over the window embrasures had been drawn as a reasonable precaution.

It was a silent gathering. Andrew Kenyon was lying back in the chair that Eden Spence had occupied. Beside him a low table had been drawn up, and the oil lamp set upon it. The table was littered with healing materials.

The man's coat, and collar, and tie had been removed. So had his waistcoat. His shirt had been pinned back wide open at the neck. His grey eyes were smiling affectionately as he watched the movements about him. But he was pale, and every now and then he squirmed with pain under June's ministrations.

The girl was on her knees with a steaming bowl of water to her hand. Standing ready to lend instant aid beside her was the motherly bulk of Ma Gillian, the expression of whose kindly plump face was one of agitated concern.

It was an ugly flesh wound on the left side of Andrew Kenyon's thick neck. And June was laving it with warm salt and water. The sight of the dripping wound and the facial contortions under the merciless sting of the salt water at last drove the old housekeeper to lamentation.

"My!" she exclaimed, in almost tragic tones. "Another haf inch. That's all. A haf inch to the right. It's the mercy o' Providence you haven't a jug-jug'lar clear through in two parts. It certainly is. Sure as death!

An' you can't fix no jug-jug'lar good with salt water. No, sir! My!"

"That towel please, Ma."

The old woman's lament was ignored by June. Uncle Andy was wounded by a shot intended to kill. Just now she had no thought but for the task under her hands. Ma passed the towel and continued her expostulations.

"I don't holt with no salt water notion, Miss Juny," she cried, as the man squirmed again. "That ther salt's settin' the pore feller crazy. It's just crool. An' it's noo-fangled like—like gasoline an' shingled skirts an' things. An' I ain't any sort o' use for bobbin' an' doin', that I ain't. I says bandages an' balsams. That's what I says. You says salt, an' kep the wound open an' bleedin'. My! Sakes! Salt an' kep it open! The dirty sneakin' scallawag. If I'd got a holt of him I'd 'a' broke my best sweeper over him, that I would. And that there Corporal Spence sittin' around here to let him do it."

The man laughed even as he shrank under the laving.

"Don't you worry, Ma, dear," he said. "My old jugular's good for years yet. It's only a graze. A glancing bullet. That's all. It's nothing to fuss about, and I've a deal too much blood anyway. That all, Juny?" he went on, as the girl stood up, and set the bowl on the table again. "It was darn bad shooting at close range."

June dabbed the gash again, and stood considering it. It was ugly enough. But she, too, realized it was only the jagged ripping of outer flesh.

"I think you'll do, uncle," she said with a sigh.

"Do? Do?" Ma Gillian ejaculated warmly. "That salt's nigh killed him. Say, Miss Juny, you ain't leavin' it that away?"

June shook her head impatiently.

"Don't be silly, Ma, dear," she cried. "Of course, not. Now a light dressing."

"Ah! Bandages. I know you'd come to 'em. An' balsams, too?"

June smiled at the woman's air of triumph. She set to work at once, and in a few minutes her uncle was coated again. Only his collar and tie were left on the table.

June superintended the removal of the healing appliances, and smilingly watched Ma waddle off with her stout arms full. As the old housekeeper reached the doorway Kenyon's voice stayed her.

"I shall wait here till Corporal Spence and Charlie get through with their search," he said. "Don't you head them off if they come along."

As the faithful housekeeper let the curtain fall behind her June drew a dep sigh.

"Thank God it's no worse, Uncle Andy!" she cried.

Now that her work was over June had reacted. There was no smile in her eyes. There was very little confidence in her either. She understood. She knew as well as her uncle the meaning of the attack. It was the logical sequence of events after the wounding of Arden, and the murder of Skeets.

Her uncle was gazing at the curtains drawn close over the windows at the shadowed far end of the room.

"It was the centre window, wasn't it, Juny?" he asked, and there was a tiredness in his voice which the girl was quick to note.

"I think so, uncle. But I don't really know. You see, Spence had pulled me down on my face behind the stove."

"Yes. That boy was like a streak of lightning," the man replied admiringly. "He certainly was. We owe him a big lot."

"I certainly do." The girl gave a little hard laugh. "I should probably have stopped a bullet but for his quickness."

"Yes. But he won't get the man who pulled on us. Those windows look right on the lake. With a kyak waiting he'd be far out of range by the time Spence and Charlie got around. No. He won't get him. And," he added thoughtfully, "in a way I'm glad."

"Yes. We don't want the police to get him," June said

thoughtfully. "You see, he can't be alone. And we want ——"

June broke off. A sound of hurrying footsteps in the hallway outside echoed sharply.

. . . . .

Eden Spence hurried into the room. He came straight to Andrew Kenyon's chair. He noted the pallor of the man's fleshy face. He noted the lounging, rather weary attitude of his body. His words came sharply.

"Where did he get you, Kenyon?" he asked.

"Same place as the chicken," the sick man smiled a little feebly.

"Bad?"

"A graze."

"Only a graze?"

Spence glanced round at June for confirmation. And June's reply came at once and confidently.

"A nasty flesh wound on the left side," she said. "It's an ugly rip. But it's not serious. Missed the jugular by about half an inch."

Spence nodded and glanced down the room.

"It was that middle window," he said.

"Did you discover anything of—him?" June's question was urgent.

But Spence was still considering the window as he replied.

"Out on the lake," he said shortly. "A kyak. There were two in it. We just made them out in the dark. They were heading south. But maybe they swung round later."

"You think they came from the—north?" June asked.

Spence nodded.

"Likely. Arden was shot north."

"Yes."

Spence moved away. He hurried down the length of the room to the window he had indicated, and drew the curtain back from it. For some moments he stood peering out into

the night. Then he turned about and stood looking back at the stove.

"Your uncle was just there, back of your chair, Miss June," he said pointing. "Will you stand right there? I need to get a look."

From his chair Andrew Kenyon watched the girl move to the spot indicated. And somehow he had no desire to move, or to speak, or take any part in the scene. A queer lassitude robbed him of all desire for activity, bodily or mental.

June stood gazing at the man at the window. She watched him move further back into the embrasure. He was gazing in her direction. But he was not looking at her. Only beyond. And presently he came again from beyond the curtain.

"Thanks," he said, as he came back to the stove. "Now, will you just pass me a hand, Miss June? Will you bring that lamp, and hold it while I take a look. There's three bullets in this room somewhere. And I want to locate one of them."

June moved at once and picked up the lamp from the table. All her eager mind was deeply concentrated. There was no need of her assurance that she was ready to help. As she stood there holding the lamp Spence was conscious only of her air of capacity, and the flaming setting that framed the picture of her pretty eyes.

"Where?" she asked.

Spence pointed.

"That far wall. Those rafters. Somewhere around. Anywhere in that direction. I just hope they didn't all three flatten against the stone walls."

. . . . .

Half an hour later the lamp was set back in its place on the table. Andrew Kenyon had risen from his chair. He was obviously a little uncertain of himself. But beyond his pallor there was no outward sign of real weakness. He was

standing beside the table, and three pairs of eyes were gazing at the four exhibits upon which the lamplight was shining. They were four bullets in such condition as final impact had left them.

Two of the bullets were almost unrecognizable. Their original shape had entirely gone. They had been flattened against stone which had proved infinitely harder than the metal of which they were composed. These had been picked up from the floor. One of the other two was practically without blemish. It was the bullet extracted from one of the roof beams, high up, where the heavy lumber rested on the top of the wall. It was a little damaged, but its identity was unmistakable.

June had just laid the recognizable bullets down beside the two others. Even to her inexperienced mind there could be no doubt whatever. They were identical. They must both have been fired from the same weapon, or from weapons of similar calibre and make.

"Anyway, Indians don't use nickel bullets," she declared in a hard tone.

Spence turned a quick look of admiration in her direction.

"I wondered if you'd get that, Miss June," he said. "Do they hand you anything else?"

"There's a white man looking to kill my uncle," she cried fiercely.

"That all?"

The policeman's gaze was searching. Kenyon was watching that grimly set face as the man addressed himself solely to June. He waited. And the girl raised her troubled eyes.

"What else could they suggest?" she asked almost coldly.

Spence shrugged in disappointment.

"Why, there's a man somewhere around Green Lake behind the very latest type of Mauser who knows your uncle is here, and—why—he's here. And so he wants to kill him. You ask to be allowed to help? Well, will you talk—now?"

But the girl turned from him. She was staring again at the bullets.

"I think they've told all that's necessary for—now," she replied evenly. "A white man has tried to kill Mr Arden. And now, uncle. Nothing I can tell you, or uncle can tell you, is going to bring him nearer to his punishment, until you—or we—get him."

Spence abruptly picked up the bullets. He put them in his pea-jacket pocket. For one moment he contemplated the yellow flame burning inside the lamp chimney. Then he turned to the wounded man, ignoring the girl who had spoken with so much finality.

"You'll be all right for to-night, Kenyon," he said quietly. "There won't be any more shooting — now. There's nothing I can do for your wound that Miss June can't do better. So, I'll just get right along down to Arden —who needs me."

Uncle and niece watched him go. They heard him hurry down the old flagged hallway, and pass out into the courtyard. Then Andrew Kenyon sat himself a little wearily in the armchair again.

June searched the tired face for a few silent moments. Then she smiled. It was a wry little smile.

"He'll have to know the whole truth, Uncle Andy," she said, with an expressive gesture.

The man inclined his head.

"I'm afraid so," he admitted. "But not yet, Juny. You were quite right, my dear, the way you answered him. If the police come along before—No, the birds are shy enough. We've gone so far we can't stand for setting them winging to fresh cover. But he's right, too. And from now on there's going to be open war with an implacable enemy."

CHAPTER VII

THE PASSING

Spence rose heavily from one of the crazy stools, which, in happier days, the inefficient hands of Mervyn Arden had laboriously contrived. A pot of steaming soup was on the stove. He lifted the lid and stirred its contents. Then he tested its temperature. And having satisfied himself he set it aside.

A few steps brought him to the bunkside where the dying missionary lay, in a position which suggested that he had made no movement since the Indians had first brought him home. He stood there with steady, searching eyes gazing down upon the distorted, unlovely thing to which disease had reduced a wholesome manhood.

Four weary days had dragged slowly to their close since that disastrous home-coming. It had been a weariness which Eden Spence had ungrudgingly endured. That was the man. He had little enough appreciation of the spiritual needs of any Indian. But he had an intense regard for the self-sacrifice of those who gave their lives for the faith actuating them. Mervyn Arden's appeal had been irresistible, and without any emotional display the policeman's feeling for him was such that no personal sacrifice of comfort, no labour on the sick man's behalf was too great for him to perform.

He knew it was all hopeless. He knew the inevitable end. He knew that Ambuk could not possibly return in time with real help. These things were so. But it did not matter. There was still the fading remains of life in that shrunken,

diseased body, and in his unskilful way Spence meant to fight death for it to the last ditch.

There was a faint muscular contortion of the sadly scarred features. There was a sigh so slight that only the intensity of the watcher's observation made it possible for him to detect. In a moment Spence had reached the soup standing ready. And, in infinitely minute doses he was forcing the liquid between the swollen lips with a small spoon.

It was a laborious process and one which he had carried out every few hours for four long days. It was scarcely a brilliant effort either. It just seemed to him a common necessity lest starvation should be an added evil to the rest. For it was part of the terrible "fly" scourge that its victims' jaws were held almost rigid.

He watched the disfigured flesh of the throat move as the patient automatically swallowed after each spoonful. And when his task was accomplished the policeman returned the rest of the liquid to the stove. Then he set his stool near to the bunk and watched. Every time he fed the dying man he went through the same performance. He would sit there in the vain hope of a return to consciousness, however, fleeting it might be.

Outside of a wild hope that he might keep the man alive till help arrived Spence had just one purpose, one single thought. He wanted a return of the man's faculties. He wanted a spoken word. He wanted something that might afford him a clue. For his whole soul and body were burning to avenge the hurt that had been so wantonly inflicted upon a simple creature who had only lived that he might succour others.

Even though four days had passed without that desired sign, the policeman still clung to his hope. And at the back of his mind he felt himself not unjustified. Throughout his weary vigil there had been several occasions when the sick man had shown distinct signs of a rally. Twice his eyes had half-opened. Once there had been a tense moment when the head had been definitely raised from its coarse pillow.

Then, on more than one occasion, guttural, unintelligible sounds had made their way from between the inflamed lips. He believed the man's unconsciousness was not complete. He believed it was due to some strange paralysis. That all the time the simple mind of the man was struggling, struggling to return to the intelligence which was normal to it.

He wanted that moment of a return to consciousness even more than he wanted to save the poor life. And his desire was the prompting of his own merciful humanity. He felt that recovery would bring with it a wrecked body and a life of helpless suffering. But, on the other hand, a word or two, a hint, that clue he prayed for, would afford him the chance of a vengeance he would pursue with the last ounce of the manhood in him.

The moments slipped away all unheeded. The noon sun outside was in sharp contrast to the ill-lit hut, whose door and window were closed the better to shade the sick man, and to shut out the curious gaze of the Indians who haunted the Mission. Spence was determined that nothing should disturb the poor soul's last moments. And, if the moment he desired came, that he alone should be there to witness it.

But there was no fresh sign. None. And after a while his vigilance relaxed. With that relaxing his thought drifted to other phases of the troubles confronting him.

There was the recent attack on Andrew Kenyon that had so nearly been successful. Clearly, to his mind, that attack had identical origin with that which had gashed the head of the missionary and murdered Skeets. It required no great astuteness to realize that there was the clue he required in that second attack if he could only read it aright. Of one thing he was definitely convinced. However, he might fail to interpret the affair, Andrew Kenyon and June both knew the source of the attack on them, and, more important still, the reason of it.

That being so, he felt confident they both knew whence had come the hurt inflicted upon Arden.

Then he argued, if they knew whence and why had come the attempt on Andrew Kenyon's life, they must also have some knowledge of the source of the troubles afflicting the Indians. For clearly, now, to his mind, Mervyn Arden's fatal journey had been taken as the result of some information relating to that which was happening to his people.

Why, he asked himself for perhaps the hundredth time, would these people not speak? What was the secret lying behind the presence of the Kenyons in the Barrens, of all places in the world? Mining engineer! What secret could a mining engineer discover in that granite world that had any right to be kept in face of something approaching wholesale murder? It was an outrage. It was—yes, it was even criminal that these people refused the information he knew it must be in their power to give.

The policeman's resentment grew as he thought of the utter selfishness of it all. It seemed to him that for some sordid game Andrew Kenyon, and even June, in fact, more particularly June, were ready to sacrifice any amount of human life. And there and then he made up his mind he would report the whole thing in close detail. He would invoke the full power of police authority. If these people thought they could get away with that sort of thing then they were wrong. If they refused to tell all they knew they were obstructing——

"It's mur—der! I—tell—you—it's——!"

Spence leapt to his feet. He was at the bunkside with the last sound of the croaking, gasping voice. The dying man's eyes were wide open, staring hideously out of thickly bloodshot surroundings. His head had lifted. It was wagging and lolling from side to side as his shoulders and arms vainly struggled to lift him into a sitting posture. His lips were curiously agape. They had somehow drawn viciously back from the teeth under them. His breath came in gasps that suggested a final, superhuman effort.

In a moment an arm was thrust under the struggling body,

and the blanket fell away as Spence lifted. The dying man was sitting up, swaying in an agony of effort. But his words were lost in the choke of his breathing.

Spence urged desperately, almost mercilessly.

"Murder?" he cried. "The Indians? Skeets?"

He waited breathlessly, hardly daring to hope. He saw the eyes close so that their inflammation was hidden. He was almost glad.

"Who murdered him?" he went on. "Bucket?"

As he pronounced that name he felt the body against his arm stiffen as though galvanized by an electric shock. There was an instant when the laboured breathing seemed to cease. Then the stiffening relaxed. And it was followed by a queer vibration as the croaking voice shook the body.

"No. Not Bucket. An— a——"

"A white man? A white man—with a rifle?"

Spence spoke slowly, distinctly. He was using all the compulsion he could fling into his questions.

The head wagged violently. But whether to convey an affirmative or not the waiting man could not decide. Then the eyes re-opened, and the whole body seemed to gain new life. An arm was raised. It flung out pointing at the bookshelf on the wall at the foot of the bunk. It fell. But only to be raised again and held there.

"Poison!" croaked the voice. "It's—poison. Here!"

The outflung hand suddenly closed on his other arm just above the wrist. Then it shot out again at the bookshelf, shaking like an aspen.

"The hills. Yes. There. Read. They're—they're——"

But there was no more. The voice broke. It died out. The mouth sagged agape, and for an instant the blood inflamed eyes rolled. A spasm shot through the body. Then it became dead weight on Spence's arm holding it, which told its instant tale. The body crumpled. The head fell back. And Eden Spence knew that the missionary's earthly labours were at last finished.

. . . . .

Spence was bending over the body, closely scrutinizing the skin of its right arm. There was a sound of movement behind him, but he appeared to give it no heed. Some time before, he had heard the door of the hut open, and had known he was not alone. He went on with his examination, which was difficult by reason of the blotches of disease. At last, however, it was completed, and he laid the arm back on the bed.

Then he straightened out the body and completely covered it with the blanket which had been disarranged. For a while he stood at the bunkside considering the slight ridge which the small body made on the sagging palliasse. And, standing there, a queer sense of loneliness stole over him.

"He was trying to tell something."

Andrew Kenyon's tones were full and deep, and came without startling. The man at the bunkside nodded without turning.

"It was that shelf," the mining engineer went on. Then with a certain eagerness: "Hadn't you better——?"

"I'm going to."

The policeman turned abruptly, and discovered the other almost immediately behind him. They stood gazing into each other's eyes. It was curious. With the passing of Mervyn Arden, Spence's old feelings of friendliness for this man had somehow become submerged. There was a measure of resentment in his look. And his jaws were set aggressively.

"He wanted to tell me all he'd discovered before he died," he said coldly. "The effort, I guess, cost him the last remains of his life. But," he added bitterly, "he, at least, was ready to make any sacrifice that the trouble of his people shouldn't go unhelped."

The other flushed. His gaze shifted at once to the bookshelf. But he nodded.

"I get that," he said sharply. "And he's not the only one."

Then Kenyon turned back to the censuring eyes, and his own were alight. He touched the bandage secured about his neck with a gesture that told of deep feeling.

"It's the luck of the game I haven't shared something of his fate. But I'm alive—still. And he's dead. His people won't go unavenged. He won't go unavenged. This," and he again indicated his neck, "won't go unavenged. Now let's be sensible and get after that bookshelf."

There was something very masterful and very earnest in the retort. Spence was about to reply with no less sharpness. But at that instant Kenyon gestured in the direction of the bed.

"I'm not the sort to cry over that great little feller," he snapped. "I want to get after those who did it."

Instead of replying Spence found himself impelled towards the bookshelf, and Kenyon was at his side.

. . . . .

The two men were standing together near the window where the light was sufficient for their purpose. Spence was holding a red-bound volume. It was open at the last entry of Mervyn Arden's diary. The entry was a long one. It occupied nearly the whole of a closely written page. He was reading it aloud, while the other followed the written word.

"I wonder how much Skeets knows. I wonder if he really knows anything at all, or if what he says is merely the gist of wilfully misleading stories the Indians bring back with them. My sense tells me that the nonsense he talks is just some vague truth distorted by native superstition. Reason tells me that. But I can't listen to reason. I've got quite beyond that. Then the man is honest and devoted. He has lain awake for a whole night working up his courage to outrage his own superstition and betray a secrecy which I gather has been imposed on the whole settlement. By whom? I wonder. O-Kuk must have been got at. Only secrecy imposed by him,

and his foolish council, would be so respected. Yes, in spite of the absurdity of the story I must believe. Furthermore, I fear I want to believe. Yes. I shall go. Spence will be angry with me for not taking him into my confidence. But Skeets insists. And if I want Skeets to show me I must do as he says. Then the more I think of it the more the absurdity of it fits in. He talks of the Bad Spirit. And the Bad Med'cine that all the Indians love. If it were anywhere else in the world than in these Barren Lands it might be different. But here there is no one but those we know. And if it were anyone we know there would be no talk of a mysterious Bad Spirit. Then this Bad Med'cine, that all the Indians love. It is that that scatters all my reasoning and grips me. Sickness, insanity, death. Bad Med'cine! It answers the whole thing. It is Bad Med'cine. What? Where? Skeets says he'll show me, so long as I defend him against the Bad Spirit. I wonder. I've promised the poor fellow. What can I do against the sort of Bad Spirit we're likely to discover? Well, God will help me. God will guide me. And, if hurt comes to poor Skeets, God will forgive me. I must surely go. It is the one chance of saving my poor, foolish, stricken people."

Spence finished reading, and Kenyon took possession of the book and stood pondering the entry. When he had finished reading he looked up and shook his head.

"He don't tell us one single thing we need to know," he said disappointedly. "Man, that's too bad! Where? That's what we want to know. The rest? Sure. 'Bad Med'cine.' 'Bad Spirit.' That's Indian. But I guess it's right. What we want is 'Where'?"

"He said the word 'hills'," Spence suggested thoughtfully.

Kenyon scorned.

"Hills? There's hundreds, maybe thousands of miles of 'em north. What a hope! What are you going to do?"

Spence took back the red leather diary which Kenyon reluctantly yielded up.

"Why, read through that diary. And when I've got it all, report in full to headquarters. They'll send a big patrol."

Kenyon thoughtfully shook his head.

"Don't do it, boy," he said earnestly. "Leave it the way it is."

"Why?"

The interrogation was jerked out with the sharpness of a suspicion the policeman could not suppress. And it called forth an impatient gesture in reply.

"If we're to get the folk who did Skeets and Arden to death, and handed me this bandage around my neck," the engineer said, "we'll need to sit around and act—foolish. It's murder," he went on quickly. "It's murder by some one who'll get on the dead run the moment they know the Police nose is to the ground." He drew a quick sigh, and his gaze took in the bunk with its tragic burden. "Hold up that report, boy, till we've looked around. I know it's best. There's mighty big disaster in the air. And can you say the way it's heading? Besides," he argued finally, "isn't it bad for you to call for help before you know you need it?"

"You don't think we need it after—that?" Spence retorted smiling, as he indicated the other's wounded neck.

"Not even after that."

Kenyon's denial was emphatic. And Spence turned away.

"I don't understand," he said. "I just can't see the game anyway. What are you driving at? Can't you talk plainly? Man, if it weren't that you'd been shot at I wouldn't listen to a word. But——"

"But I have been attacked—deliberately. Some one's yearning to get me. So let me have a hand in the play—my way." Kenyon smiled grimly. "Won't you give me the privilege of offering myself a target. Won't you keep your police off awhile, and—let them come again? Boy,"

he raised two clenched fists and gestured, "I want them to come again. Again and again till—I get them."

"Or they get you."

"Yes. Or they get me. Now, I must get back to Juny. She's waiting to hear."

. . . . .

But Andrew Kenyon did not immediately return to his niece. Instead, he and Eden Spence found themselves at the landing where Bucket, the man from north of the Gateway, was making fast his laden kyak. The impulse had been mutual. When they saw the unexpected figure on the landing they went down to him at once.

Bucket's greeting was instant. It came eagerly.

"Say," he cried, straightening up from his task, "I just got it from a bunch of neches on the river, and pulled right in. It ain't true. He ain't amiss? They said—'fly'?"

Bucket was a lean, fair, muscular creature with a slouch that was the habit of years of indifference. But in spite of it, in spite of his rough trail clothing that was more than half Indian, the man possessed an air. Kenyon, observing, thought of the panther, but Spence only thought of the "detrimental" who figured so largely in his work. At any rate, as both men noted the sallow, sun-tanned features, the supposedly shaven chin and mouth, the prominent aquiline nose that gave him such a hawk-like appearance, the staring pallor of his light blue, fish-like eyes, they found nothing that made him welcome.

"Arden's dead," the policeman said briefly.

"Dead? God Almighty! They said 'fly'—but——"

"It was 'fly,' all right. But he was just as much murdered by the fellow who shot him up with a Mauser rifle."

Kenyon was watching the effect of the policeman's announcement, and it gave him food for thought. He watched the widening of those pale eyes.

"Murdered?" Bucket shook his head. "I didn't get any of that."

"Yet the neches knew. They brought him in."

"They never said anything but the 'fly,'" Bucket replied with a sanguinary oath.

Kenyon watched the man's brown-burnt hand search his hip pocket. He saw him produce a packet of cheap cigarettes and stick one in the corner of his loose mouth.

"And it was—a Mauser?" he said, striking a sulphur match, and flicking the burning sulphur till the flame burned clear.

"Yes," Spence said. "He pulled out of here three weeks back—for somewhere. And he was brought along in four days ago, sick to death, by some of his neches. His Indian was with him. Arden was shot in the head. Skeets was shot to pieces. I took a Mauser bullet out of his dead carcase."

Bucket blew smoke from a deep inhalation.

"I don't know a Mauser on the river," he said sharply, and his expressionless eyes passed from the policeman to the bandage about the engineer's neck.

"But there is one," Spence said simply.

"I s'pose there must be," Bucket admitted.

He went on drinking in deep gulps of tobacco smoke till his cigarette was burning furiously. The search had gone out of his eyes which had narrowed as they gazed out over the sunlit lake. Then suddenly he flung the hot cigarette into the water.

"I—don't get it," he declared emphatically. "Who wanted to kill that swell little feller? He hadn't ever done a thing but help folks along. I'd say he'd a whole army of angels beaten a mile." His eyes flashed round again at the policeman. "What are you going to do?"

"Look for the Mauser you say isn't on the river," Spence replied at once.

Bucket laughed sneeringly.

"That all?" he cried. "That won't get you far. I tell you, if there was a Mauser on the river I'd know it. I like knowing things like that." Then his manner suddenly

changed. The sneer had passed, and his fish-like eyes became serious. He glanced quickly from his boat up at the noon sun. "Gee, I must beat it if I mean to camp on the flats to-night," he exclaimed. "I just couldn't help pulling in to hear. Arden! I tell you I don't get that Mauser play. Murdered! Red or white I don't believe there's a feller on these darn Barrens who'd pull a gun on Mervyn Arden. For all you say I can't get it, and that's a fact." He dropped to his mooring and began to cast off. "Say, Corporal," he went on, "if there's a thing I can do I'll be glad. I'm making Vannie's for trade. I'm needing—truck. Can I pass a word along for you? You'll need to get some of your boys up, I guess, to make a big hunt. Can I——?"

Spence's eyes were without warmth as he shook his head.

"I don't need to send any word," he said. "I reckon to put this through my own way. Maybe I'll see you at Vannie's though. I'll be making a trip in a while for gas. I look like needing a deal over this thing."

Bucket released the mooring. Now he stood up holding the heavily laden craft against the stream. The bandaged neck of Andrew Kenyon still seemed to attract him while he spoke his farewell to the policeman.

"Well, you've only got to name it, Corporal," he said cordially. "This thing's got me. Arden! It fairly turns my guts right over. So long. Maybe I'll see you at Vannie's."

The man stepped lightly into his rocking craft and dropped instantly to his knees. And again Kenyon thought of the panther. Then the paddle dipped, and the vessel shot out from the landing under skilful hands.

It was Spence's voice that broke in on the engineer's absorbed contemplation of the speeding craft.

"I wonder what crime holds that feller from the thing he was born to?" he said.

"I'd hate to know," Kenyon replied, with a shrug. "When his sort have to hide north of 60° a muck hole is

mostly a clean thing to what lies back of them. Anyway he's got what he came for."

"What's that?"

"Why, to know what you're going to do about Arden."

"You think——?"

But Kenyon negatived smilingly.

"No. He had nothing to do with the murder. That's not his job. But he wanted to know all the same."

CHAPTER VIII

ALPHAINE

In a remote alcove, screened to some extent from the rest of the room by a pair of heavy pillars supporting a somewhat narrow, gilded arch, two diners were smoking contemplatively over their coffee. Their cigars were unusually long and obviously expensive. Then, each had before him a big-bowled glass containing a generous measure of the old brandy for which Maurice Calma's cellar was justly renowned.

The dining-room at Calma's was an alluring place at night, with its curious nooks and corners, its many pillars, its panelling and tapestries, and its rose-tinted lights, dotting the multitude of tables like fairy lamps at twilight. To the casual observer Calma's dining-room, which was capable of seating five hundred guests, might have seemed to be a series of odd-shaped rooms of many sizes linked together by the simple process of demolishing walls and doorways and replacing them with pillared archways of semi-classical design. But this was not the reality. It was an elaborate reproduction of the dining-room of a very celebrated hostelry in old-world France.

Maurice Calma had had a very definite object in view in the designing of his dining-room. Not only did he desire to satisfy his own æsthetic taste, but for purely business reasons he was determined to get away from the inevitable publicity, and somewhat stereotyped architecture of the modern hotel dining-room. Thus, in the result, his taste was satisfied, and he had for his reward a complete mono-

poly of the patronage of the most exclusive of Quebec's citizens. Furthermore, the renown of his hotel had travelled throughout the length and breadth of the country.

It was not yet the fashionable dining-hour, and the tide of guests was still to flow. There were few people at the tables, and the silent-footed waiters were still moving about the seductively lit apartment putting their final touches to the setting for the elaborate toilets of the women who would soon crowd the tables.

The men in the alcove were in sharp contrast both in personality and dress. One was small. He was youthfully slim but sturdy, and sat stiffly erect so that the white front of his shirt lay close to his bosom without the smallest inclination to bulge. His dinner jacket was without a crease and gave him a " poured in " effect. And, although he was talking earnestly, he sat almost motionless.

On the other hand, his companion was big, and loose-limbed, and given to sprawling. And somehow his evening clothes were essentially characteristic of the body for which they had been made. Then, whereas the smaller man had hair that was neatly brushed, and a carefully trimmed moustache and pointed beard and his face was without a line of ageing, the bigger man was dark and rugged, with cheeks that were lean to cadaverousness. He was immensely muscular, too. And whatever lack of style there may have been in his clothing it was more than compensated by the suggestion of vigorous, thrusting manhood which his sprawling attitude displayed.

There was no waiter in the alcove, and the smaller man was talking freely in a somewhat low tone. He was holding his cigar carefully poised, and his eyes were contemplatively regarding its perfect white ash.

" It's cost us one hundred thousand dollars so far," he said. " And it looks like costing a lot more yet." He returned his cigar to his mouth and drew lightly, so that only the faintest stream of smoke came from between his lips. " But it's of no real consequence what it costs so long as we

finally locate it. Half a million? A million? No. The money would be well spent. We must have it. It's that or ruin."

The bigger man's eyes were watching the unemotional expression that accompanied the announcement of vast expenditure and possible disaster. He knew that for all the other's almost foppish exterior he was a man of iron nerve. A man whose cold purpose was almost inhuman.

"When you talk that way I don't usually question," the big man said, in a low somewhat harsh tone. "It don't seem to me I need to. It's not your way to make mistakes in measuring the other feller. But when the little white witch we're interested in takes a holt I haven't heard she ever lets go."

The man across the table inclined stiffly. His keen eyes turned in the direction of a party of men and women moving down amongst the tables beyond the alcove. Then their gaze came back to the face opposite, and its coolness was extraordinary in its contempt.

"No," he agreed. "I don't make mistakes in such things. The care of the wealth it's taken so long to accumulate doesn't permit of mistakes in—the other fellow. It's as you say. The little white witch holds fast. But the other, it's an—octopus. Its power is infinite. The white witch. Psha! Those who know the new love spurn the white witch as a harridan who only inspires contempt. In two years our sales have dropped by twenty-five per cent. In another year they will have halved again. In months after that this stuff will have completed its strangle-hold, and we shall go out of business."

It was said so calmly. It gathered no force from any emotion. And the sprawling man was impelled to sip his brandy to quicken the nerve which had fluttered under the frigid conviction forced upon him. He sat up. He thrust his cigar into the corner of his mouth and chewed it savagely. He raised a hand and smoothed back his rather lank dark hair.

" I'd a feeling the whole darn thing was just a—nightmare," he said sharply. " For ten years the white witch has had her way, and the harvest has grown to a bumper. We've pulled the game and helped ourselves as we chose. And now, suddenly, this new stuff. I can't get the measure of it."

The motionless figure beyond the table again blew a faint spiral of smoke from between pursed lips.

" Listen, my friend. This new stuff is a nightmare surely," he said. " But it's real. Very real. It's so real that those who taste it want no other. And so they will pay any price for it. There's the simple fact. We just can't compete. It's not competition anyway. We simply don't sell. And soon we can't give away. If it costs a million—ten millions, we must put those who make it out of business. We would buy them. But," he shook his head slowly, " you can't buy those who don't seem to exist. Even if we knew them, would they sell ? Why should they ? No," he added, with some emphasis, " Alphaine will yield them a fortune you couldn't count in a lifetime. They would not sell. But we must get the secret of it. And we can get it—now."

The man raised his brandy to his lips, and sipped with appreciation. The other eyed him from between narrowed lids.

" How ? " he asked.

" We have the locality where they make it. And it has cost us one hundred thousand dollars to find it."

The other nodded and propped his elbows on the table.

" Where ? "

" In this country." The man gestured for the first time.

" Just where ? " persisted the other.

A negative movement replied.

" For two years we've trailed," the calm tones went on. " Think, in two years, and expending one hundred thousand dollars, we find one man who comes out of the north. For ten thousand dollars he sells two parcels of alphaine. They both hold five pounds of the stuff. He comes by river and

lake. We know where he is when he sells. But we know no more. One hundred thousand dollars! But it's well spent. The rest will come. The man who sells, he is flesh and blood. Yes."

"He will sell again," was the significant comment.

"Surely—if we don't frighten him." The neat figure leant towards the table. "Now, I tell," he said with the faintest urge. "Two of ours buy. They promise to buy again. Each takes one parcel. They go their separate ways lest accident befall both. One comes through. Five pounds of alphaine. It's in my safe. The other? The police at Athaba find him. He is dead. The police take his parcel."

He shrugged and produced a small gold snuff-box which he opened. When the lid was raised the pale green powder it contained was revealed to the eager eyes across the table.

The box changed hands, and the shining eyes that peered into it were full of greed. The big man dipped his forefinger into the powder and studied it curiously. Then he raised his hand as though about to smell the stuff. A sharp word checked the movement.

"Don't!"

The men looked into each other's faces. The warning shot plainly enough from the eyes across the table. The big man lowered his hand and wiped his forefinger on his napkin. Then the other's head shook admonishingly.

"You forget the—octopus," he said. Then a cold smile lit his smooth features. "Sniff that once and you will sniff it again. It's a thousand times more alluring than the white witch. Others can do the sniffing. For you, for me, there is work. Yes. There's work and such fortune as even you have never dreamed of. There is such fortune in a few years as a lifetime of the other could not provide. Two years, and one hundred thousand dollars," he ruminated. "No, it is not badly spent. Soon, I think, if there is luck and no foolishness, those others will be out of the business."

"And where do I come in—in the work?"

The smaller man smiled at the question. Then he

deliberately deposited the ash of his cigar in the tray beside him.

"You are the most important factor," he assured. "You will now listen while I say all there is to do. You will listen with both your very sharp ears. You will come with your fresh mind, and maybe you will discover flaws in the plan I have made. It is for that we have this alcove to ourselves. It is for that we have chosen this early hour to eat."

So, with the snuff-box containing the powder returned to its place in its owner's pocket, and while the bigger of the two men sprawled in his seat, and the other sat rigidly erect, the talk went on to its conclusion.

Nor was that conclusion long delayed. For the man was keen and brief in his methods, and the other was none so short in his powers of up-take. The calm voice went on uninterrupted by a single question. And only was it at the end of the story that the other made himself heard. Even then his questions were few and their answers brief.

And so they were able to pass out of the great dining-room at Calma's hotel well before the general throng of diners entered it.

CHAPTER IX

THE LOST TRAIL

THERE was a charged atmosphere about the Department of the Comptroller of Police. It pervaded the entire establishment from the office of General Haldock Bunsten himself to the desk of the humblest clerk.

For two days, now, heads of departments had feared the telephones connecting them directly with the General's office. Their insistent purr had become anathema. Officers of the executive gladly welcomed any duty that absented them from headquarters. Even the most efficient lady typist pounded her machine with a heart as heavy as her hands.

The Government Departments of Ottawa differed in no way from the rest of their kind. Ordinarily their efficiency was beyond reproach. But when the machinery became faulty, when the human engine, so to speak, began to miss-fire, it was never a case for simple adjustment. Some part, some minute integral part, perhaps, however insignificant, humble, was certain to find the scrap heap. Everyone knew that that was the trouble with the Police Department now. And everyone was asking the same question. Who would be made the scape-goat ?

Jula von Naarstein had vanished from Quebec !

Cecil Arlo, the Comptroller's personal private secretary, rose from his chair beside the General's capacious, roll-top desk. He had endured a snappy two hours of dealing with masses of correspondence. The white-haired volcano behind the desk had tried him to the limit. But at last he was dismissed. And his relief was profound.

He collected the sheaves of paper representing the work to be dealt with, and slipped them within a large portfolio. The General was paying no heed, for which the secretary was thankful. The keen grey eyes under their dominating brows were turned upon the window, beyond which was a fine view of the great parliament buildings. The Comptroller's somewhat florid face was troubled. And Arlo recognized the symptom. He hastily put his final formal interrogation.

"Anything further, sir?"

The General withdrew his gaze from the window with something of a start. For a moment he regarded his waiting secretary as though discovering him for the first time and wondering at his presence. Then he turned again to the view beyond the window.

"Ring through to Captain Masters. Ask him to be good enough to step up here immediately."

The Comptroller spoke in the staccato that warned his secretary. The man felt that Captain Masters, Chief of the Secret Police, was likely to enjoy an even less happy time than had fallen to his own lot that morning.

He passed from the room, and the General almost bounded out of his chair. In a moment he was pacing the richly carpeted floor.

General Haldock Bunsten was a stoutish creature. His body was well matched by his mental processes. Force, alertness, honesty of purpose were the characteristics that had won him political place and power. To his friends he was the personification of loyal efficiency. To those who served him he was a just but hard-driving martinet.

Just now he had abandoned uniform for plain clothes. And the result was not without detriment. He was round, broad, short. And the trousers of his thick tweeds were his valet's despair. But there was no lack in the man's personality. His rugged face was clean-cut and strong. His shock of grey hair was as ample as that of a youth. And his closely cropped moustache bristled in the most approved military fashion.

A dozen journeys across the carpet brought him to a halt at the head of a long mahogany board-room table. It was a silver-mounted blotter at which he had paused. And on it were littered a tin box, which had been prised open with a can-opener, a square packet in paper, secured with string and sealing wax, and an open letter, dated at Fort Marie on Lake Athaba, which was signed by Richard Ferrers, Inspector and Commanding Officer.

He surveyed the collection for some silent moments. Then he picked up the letter.

He read it carefully. And as he was just about reaching the signature the door at the far end of the apartment was thrust open without preliminary warning.

"Morning, Captain Masters," he said, without looking up. Then, with a gesture of feeling, he flung the paper down and picked up the parcel. "Alphaine!" he jerked at the newcomer in an ominous tone as he held the packet up for inspection.

The General snapped a severe glance in the direction of his subordinate. And a pair of dark eyes responded inscrutably.

Captain Gene Masters was tall and loose-framed. He gave something of the impression of a rawboned horse, a creature whose body and limbs were made up of lean muscle and bone, without an ounce of fat in the whole of its make-up. And the likeness even extended to the long, lean face, and the prominent bright eyes, and the almost angular sharpness of his cheek bones. His clothing was of blue serge with a double-breasted coat, and his shirt-collar was unstarched. There was perhaps more care in his personal appearance than in that of the General. But whereas the General's tweeds were of the very best quality, the blue serge which Masters wore looked to have endured years of pressing and cleaning.

He pondered the angular parcel.

"From?" the head of the Secret Police spared.

"Lake Athaba. Found on the trafficker. He didn't know

better to than defeat us by dying." The General paused. Then he exploded finally. "It's alphaine! You get that?"

The Comptroller flung the parcel down with a gesture of fierce resentment. And, as he did so, the wrapping burst and a stream of pale green powder poured on the immaculate blotting sheet. He gazed at it. Then his stout body impelled towards the swivel chair at his desk and flung itself into it.

"Listen!" he cried harshly. "There's going to be a riot in this department. And it begins right here."

The detective assumed the secretary's chair without invitation, and faced his chief.

"And it won't help us a little bit in stopping the sale and manufacture of that foul drug, Chief."

Master's tone was cold, calm, confident. It was not in the manner of a man who feared the threatened riot. Furthermore, it served as a check to the volcanic surge in the other.

The General let his fist fall on his desk. But the blow lacked his usual force. And no vocal violence accompanied it. After a moment he spoke. And the flush had died out of his cheeks, and his words came in a calm that matched the other's.

"I spent two hours with the Prime Minister yesterday afternoon. And the subject of my interview was alphaine, and—the inefficiency of my Department. Alphaine has become the paramount anxiety of the Government, and the wildest shriek of the Press. I've been given six months for a clean up of this matter. Six months! A time limit! It means your job, as well as my position. Then I come here this morning to find this letter and this stuff, and your report telling me that that arch-fiend, Count Jula von Naarstein, has slipped through your hands in Quebec. Tell me something."

Captain Masters displayed no outward concern. That was his way when dealing with the General. His whole object was always to steady his chief in moments of crisis,

that he might obtain the full benefit of the fiery soldier's clearest judgment.

"I've been expecting something of the sort, Chief, without these two things happening," he said reflectively. "And on the whole I'm rather glad."

"Glad? It means our—— !"

Master's long face relaxed into something like a smile.

"My job and your—position. Exactly, Chief. Well, we're going to save both. And this six months' limit should help us. You see, it's practically like giving us a free hand. If they fix a time limit then they say do all you know in that time. I propose to do just that, with your permission. And it won't be my fault if I don't save my job and your—position."

The General pushed a cigar box in his subordinate's direction, and sat back in his chair. He watched the strong fingers of the detective select a cigar, pierce its end, and light it. As Masters settled himself for quiet enjoyment the General found himself considering matters with a coolness he had not known since he had endured the interview with the Prime Minister the day before.

"Leaving all personal consideration out of the matter," he said, "the position is pretty—ghastly. I mean this alphaine." He looked over at the board-room table where the pale green powder was strewn on the blotter. "I'm pretty sick about the Press. But it's right. And the Prime Minister made a whole lot about this stuff plain to me that I hadn't believed before. It's apparently the deadliest drug that the crazy human mind ever craved for. So far as I make it out it's ten times more seductive and deadly than cocaine. The Prime Minister assured me that unless we can put the manufacturers of this new dope out of action, in ten years it will devastate not only our country but the whole American continent and possibly the world. Maybe that's an exaggeration to get us moving. But——"

"It isn't, Chief. That's exactly true. I've had it from the heads of our medical faculty."

The General's deep-set eyes widened. He was scarified by the other's confident assertion.

"What is it? This stuff?" he asked, a little breathlessly.

Masters smoked thoughtfully. Then he removed his cigar, and his eyes gazed consideringly.

"I don't know. Nor, seemingly, do the doctors. But this I do know. Whatever it is it's not imported like cocaine. It's manufactured right here in this country, and somewhere north. That parcel from Athaba only confirms me in my certainty. I'm glad they picked it up. And my only regret is I can't put the feller they got it from through a close examination. Still, that doesn't matter too much. We're nearer to its source as a result of that pick up. The thing that concerns me most at the moment is this business of Von Naarstein. We've had him pinned down in Quebec for six months. He hasn't been able to make a single move that we weren't wise to. And now—now that fool, Abe Butcher, who was in charge of the affair, has let him slip. He's left Quebec without a trace."

"Von Naarstein!" The General helped himself to a cigar. "You know, Masters," he went on thoughtfully, as he snapped his lighter closed, "it's almost incredible to me the hideous depths some human natures will probe in the search for added wealth. Take this man. One of the richest bankers in this country, with every prospect of vaster wealth in the future. You'd think that would be sufficient for the vilest avarice. Not a bit of it. We know, only we can't prove it—he's too clever for that—that he's the head, shoulders, and body of the cocaine traffic in this country. Maybe, even, of the whole continent. His tentacles reach everywhere. His organization is the most perfect both for importation and distribution. And it leaves us powerless. We've nothing we can prove on him. Not a thing. We know he's the man. That's all. When you think of the awful devastation of that cursed drug you can well realize that Hell never bred a worse fiend than this wealthy Swede

banker. It's ghastly. And he's slipped us. How? But infinitely more important, why?"

"Do you need to ask 'why,' General?"

The detective was sitting up. His eyes were shining with the hint of a savage smile. His cigar was forgotten.

"You know the reason?"

Masters spread his lean hands, which had a curious resemblance to claws.

"Those poor darn lunatics who've once sniffed alphaine won't look at Von Naarstein's dope. He sees the bottom dropping out of his trade. If I can make a right guess that Swedish money machine is like us. He's out to locate the alphaine factory and scrap it. Or acquire it. I've been waiting, guessing for such a move. And now, I think he's made it."

The General leapt to his feet. Again came his unsteady pacing of the room. And the dark eyes watched the fierce activity of it while their owner continued to smoke. The General came to a pause near the board-room table.

"This man Butcher. Has he come in from Quebec?"

The detective's eyelids flickered.

"I've got him right here. I promised him you'd have a word to say."

The words were spoken without emotion. But, to the General, who understood his Chief-of-Staff, the feeling behind them was plain enough.

"I'll see him now!"

The Comptroller was seated at his desk again when Detective-Sergeant Abe Butcher was conducted into his presence by Captain Masters. He was an alert, keen-eyed man of medium height. He, too, was in plain clothes. But his carriage was obvious. He was clearly a man who had graduated to his present position through the Royal Mounted Police. The General wasted no time in preliminaries.

"You've let this man Naarstein get away from Quebec. A clean getaway."

The man flushed under the tone of the accusation. But

his reply came steadily while he glanced swiftly from Captain Masters to the hot-eyed Comptroller.

"He's got away, sir, with his house watched back and front. I had orders to pull that international crook, Jabez Otis, who had registered at a down-town hotel. I had to put the job through. But I left three of my best men shadowing at Von Naarstein's house."

"Who sent you after Otis?"

"The order came through, signed by Captain Masters, sir."

The General glanced up into the dark face of the detective chief. It was a sharp, silent interrogation to which the secret policeman replied instantly.

"That's perfectly true, sir," he said quietly. "I signed the order for the arrest of Jabez Otis, and dispatched it with the warrant. But my order did not involve the personal attention of Sergeant Butcher. His special work was Von Naarstein. As he is in charge of our department in Quebec his obvious duty was to notify the Quebec City Police, and pass them the warrant. The matter was elementary."

The General inclined his head. Then his eyes levelled themselves at the unfortunate man beyond the desk.

"That will do, Sergeant," he observed coldly. "The matter will be dealt with in the usual manner."

"But, sir, I——"

"That will do. You can go."

The frigidity of the final order was irresistible. And Sergeant Butcher found himself beyond the door of the Comptroller's office, a prey to something very like panic.

With the man's going General Bunsten turned sharply on the man beside him, and there was no mistaking his mood and the censure that looked coldly up at the other.

"I'm by no means sure that the blame rests wholly with Sergeant Butcher," he said. "Your order and the warrant were due to reach him. That is true. But you had a right to make it plain, in view of the urgency of his personal work, that this arrest must not be allowed to interfere with his watch on Von Naarstein. You should have instructed him

clearly to that end. However, we can leave that for the moment. Forthwith you will send out an S.O.S. to every police post throughout the country. All city police as well as our own people. You must raise a hue and cry till we pick up that devil's trail again. And when that is done God help the man who fails in his duty."

"Yes, sir. And may I offer a suggestion?"

The General cocked an alert eye, and it was none too friendly.

"Of what nature?" he asked shortly.

The man at the desk was a little intrigued. The face of his principal lieutenant had undergone a startling transformation. Gene Masters had given way to definite emotion. Perhaps it was his chief's cold condemnation. Perhaps he was moved by the general slur on the work of his department, for which, in the end, he alone was responsible. The dark eyes were shining with a zeal characteristic of the man he was facing. And his words came without any of their usual well-considered official manner.

"We have been given a time limit of six months!" he said sharply. "Will you grant me six months' leave of absence? It can be given out that I'm making Europe—on holiday. We can even have my name on the passenger list of the next liner out. I want to go north. It's the only thing, General. I must go. I've located some odd bits of information that may lead to the clue I want. And if I'm right I may get the right evidence we're yearning for against this devil, Von Naarstein. It's our big chance. And all this stuff makes me want to grab it with both hands. I want to get off without a moment's delay. Before Naarstein's trail gets cold."

The General produced his lighter. He opened it, and watched the flame break out. Then he held it out to the other.

"Your cigar is out, Masters," he said. "Best light it."

The other accepted the light with a short laugh. And the Comptroller went on talking.

"That's an excellent suggestion," he agreed quietly. "Take your six months' leave. It shall be nominally that. But—" He paused. Then he took back his lighter, closed it, and returned it to his pocket. "But don't limit it—if necessary. Don't return till you've tracked down this poisonous stuff—this alphaine. Or, at least, till you've located Von Naarstein, and found the right sort of evidence against him. We want the one as much as the other, Masters. And anyway I must have results. You understand? Results."

CHAPTER X

ON THE SHORES OF HUDSON'S BAY

The Reverend Josiah Varser sighed as he laid aside the letter he had been reading aloud. His manner was expressive of deep feeling. But when he looked up, and his gaze encountered the eager creature poised on the edge of the hard Windsor chair opposite him, his eyes lit with a smile of kindliness.

"He was one of the world's good men, Alof," he said. "There are many to be found amongst our workers. Men utterly without self. It is a grievous loss. To me the irreparable loss of a well-loved friend. And I pray God to rest him and give him peace."

The churchman's gaze dwelt upon the younger man's face thoughtfully. His luminous, intelligent eyes were reading profoundly the human pages he found there. The student's ardour was shining in his eyes.

"Mervyn's Arden's name was already historic in our college, sir," Alof Lenoir replied eagerly, with an enthusiasm so profound with possibilities. "Surely his death is a world loss. With you, sir, I pray that he may rest in peace."

The Reverend Josiah turned in survey of the unpretentious room which was at once his study, and the office whence he administered the affairs of his Mission College at Keewin on the shores of Hudson's Bay. The book-lined walls were characteristic of all the rest. It was a student's room, without pretence. It contained all that was necessary, while it was barren of any luxury.

The old eyes passed to the window which gave on to the

drab shores of the great inland sea. Outside a leaden sky matched the dour of the grey world it roofed. Even with the summer season well advanced there looked to be nothing there in Nature to gladden the human life dwelling upon those dull shores.

For forty odd years the grey stone Mission College had stood up, a long, low, two-storied building, a grim landmark, barracks, as it were, for the training of those ardent forces recruited for the battle against the spiritual darkness of Canada's far flung savage races. And so it would remain till the final crumbling of civilization. It was a monument, too. A monument to those inspired teachings which in nearly two thousand years have remained the concrete pivot about which the spiritual life of humanity has revolved. And for those forty years, Josiah Varser, a man of profound human kindness and wisdom, had reigned its supreme head.

Now he was old. In years he was very aged. But, in his spirit of calm enthusiasm for his labours he was not one day older than when first appointed to his office.

In spite of his courage and self-repression, however, the aged man's grievous loss was excessive, and his present task was rendered doubly heavy. His letter of that morning, from Green Lake, had meant the passing of a life's friendship. The lamentable death of Mervyn Arden was a very, very severe blow. But his work was paramount, and he turned to it without a sign of flinching.

Alof Lenoir was there at his bidding, a student of mature years, who had completed his graduation and was ready for the front line of battle. So he bent on him that warm regard which his pupils knew and loved so well.

"It is a big thing you will be asked, Alof," the old man said at last, in his somewhat rolling tones. "But one for which I am confident you are fitted. You have courage, enthusiasm. You are not so young that you cannot endure the isolation. Above all you have sympathy and tolerance, without which no man could ever hope to follow Mervyn Arden. A new post among Indians and Eskimos is often a

thing of heartbreak as well as hardship. You will be spared that on Green Lake. It is a well-established post, the life-work of a simple man of supreme ability. And therein lies the bigness of your task. You will have to follow Mervyn Arden."

The old man's smile was full of confidence.

"Will you dare it?" he asked encouragingly. "Will you follow that great little man? I believe you are richly endowed with his spirit. I believe that is so. The test of time, however, can only tell us the truth of my belief. You have been one of my most trusted pupils. And I shall be very, very glad if you will consent to go to Green Lake. I know it is within my power to order you there. But you know that is not my way. I look always only for willing service. Will you?"

The missionary rose abruptly from his chair as the other put his final request. His movement was almost spasmodic. He gestured with expressive hands.

"Will I go?" he cried fervently, while his eyes lit and the churchman read in their depths the thing he most desired. "You ask me that, sir? You, who have taught me and guided all my studies, and listened to the longings I have poured into your patient ears? I ask no better than to go at once. And if God wills, and strength is vouchsafed to me, I shall strive with my whole soul to follow the light path of the lamp which Mervyn Arden lit and maintained for thirty years. It is all I ask. All, all! Will I dare? Will I face the great, glorious task? God grant you will not think better of your decision, sir. Let me go now. At once. And I will bless you and thank you all my days."

The old man produced a snuff-box. He snuffed heavily and trumpeted into a coarse, coloured handkerchief while he studied the passionate eyes gazing into his own. Alof Lenoir's response was very heartening to him.

"Thank you, my boy," he said, as he bundled his handkerchief into a capacious pocket. "But we must not go too

fast," he smiled indulgently. "You shall go as soon as you can make ready. There is much to prepare. A week. Yes. Perhaps. I think you can be ready in a week."

"Oh, yes, sir. But surely in less time. I only need to pack my——"

Josiah Varser's smile was very kindly.

"Oh, it's not so easy, my son," he laughed. "It's a long, long river trail up the Keewin to Lake Moon. Then the Moon River to Bluff Lake. And after that the great mystery river, the Thelon. It's many miles of broken waters and inland seas to Green Lake. Muskegs, and rapids, and the desolation of the Barren Lands. I have had it all from Mervyn Arden, whose only fear in life was that same journey. You must be completely equipped for the long trail. You will go up by the Bay steamer to Bear Point on the Keewin estuary. There we must have a Mission boat in readiness, with one of our best river men, and all the necessary camp outfit. Your personal preparations will be made here, of course. You will have the usual three hundred dollar credit at Hantock's, who knows the schedule of supplies with which to provide you. Then, out of that credit, in addition, you must outfit your wardrobe for a long, long period. You see, you may not return for some years. If you require the credit extended you can have it, an advance on your salary. Just as much as you need. But Hantock will advise you. Every man who has gone forth into the wilderness from this College has passed through his capable hands. Now, go, Alof, and get ready. And do not forget to write your dear mother, at home in your beautiful Stockholm, just where you are going. And tell her we shall keep her informed from here as to your well-being."

The graduate stood for a moment without moving. His shining eyes told the other all he wanted to know. Then of a sudden a hand was thrust out, a slim, white, soft hand, of which the churchman promptly took possession. There was a word of thanks; deep, heartfelt thanks. A gentle blessing followed. Then the old man's luminous eyes gazed

after the sturdy, square-shouldered figure as it moved towards the door.

. . . . .

Hantock's was Keewin's great trading store. It was a development of the years, watched over and fostered by the cold, calculating brain of a man whose boast it was that he could extract profit out of anything that everybody else had discarded as valueless.

But his boast had never been put to the test on the shores of Hudson's Bay. On the contrary, his store, from small beginnings, had developed automatically as a result of its proprietor's opportunism, and the growing needs of the white and native adventurers in their penetration of the northern wastes.

Men of the long trail could obtain everything they desired at Hantock's, from husky dogs to gee-poles, from the stoutest of light river craft to material with which to clothe and satisfy their tough bodies. Seafaring men, whether sailors or mere "sea-food getters," could procure the fulfilment of their every need from boat tackle to ground bait. Nor was the simple citizen forgotten in that vast emporium of human supplies. Store clothing, modelled in patterns said to be the fashion in the great cities, were displayed at prices far beyond any actual value they possessed. And eager women, whether white or coloured, were lured with vivid colours and patterns said to come straight from those centres of culture which dictate their will upon the feminine world.

It was an emporium of barter of every description. And no opportunity was missed by the hard-eyed business man of Hebrew-Scottish origin who found no profit too inconsiderable with which to swell his fortunes. It was well said of the somewhat disreputable Sandy Hantock that he only differentiated between a Bible and bad liquor to the extent of the profit involved in the sale of each.

As a natural corollary Sandy was more than a rich man. And then, as is sometimes the case, the richer he grew the

less he displayed the fact. Time was, before wealth came his way, that he found it necessary to possess outward and visible sign of prosperity. But now, at the time when Alof Lenoir needed to visit the emporium for his outfit, he found the proprietor clad in mean raiment, and looking as generally unkempt as a hoboe straight off the axles of a transcontinental freight train. Unclean, unshaven features, and a tangle of uncombed lank grey hair surmounted a coatless body revealing a shirt whose original hue had undoubtedly been that of blue.

Sandy Hantock was engaged with a neatly dressed man who more than suggested a travelling salesman. But at the sight of the missionary he instantly detached himself, and came towards him out of his jungle of stores.

Lenoir protested. He was eager to gaze about him in this principal show-room which represented something of the vast stock stored in no less than twenty other buildings which made up the trader's premises. He felt like some young creature about to attend a long-desired, happy function. No bride preparing for the great day of her life could have been filled with more vital emotions. He was an heir about to enter upon possession of his patrimony. Sandy Hantock brushed aside his protest with a loud-voiced heartiness that displayed a wealth of gold-filled teeth, and a grin that failed to disturb the watchfulness of his hard eyes.

"Say, he don't worry any," he guffawed. "I can pass him his order sheet when I fancy. An' he'll be glad enough to wait around. It's my job to sell. I only buy in my spare time."

The salesman had followed on his victim's heels. And he responded to the sally with a smile of obsequious amusement.

Alof Lenoir glanced about him a trifle helplessly. He was quite foreign to the task in hand. He saw the many assistants at work, stacking, packing, dusting, and he wondered where to begin.

"It's an outfit," he hesitated. "A three hundred dollar outfit. I'm going north."

His bewilderment seemed to increase as he proceeded. And Sandy Hantock hurled himself to his rescue.

"Why that's dead easy, Mr Lenoir," he said. "Just our routine stuff. You see, we're doin' it all the time when we ain't outfittin' the sea-folk. I had word along from the Reverend Josiah. I'll just have your necessaries packed right an' made ready for shipment. But, of course, ther's your personal fixin's. That's different, ain't it?" he added with a wink. "We can't do that to schedule. Guess I best hail my head boy. He'll show you store suits an' underwear that'll do your eyes good. What part are you makin'?"

The man's effusiveness reacted detrimentally on the missionary.

"Green Lake," Lenoir replied coolly.

"O' course. Now what made me ask that fool question? You'll be takin' the place o' that boy, Arden. He was done up by the neches—or something."

Lenoir shook his head.

"No. Sickness," he said. "At least that's what I understood."

"So?" The trader's cold eyes were expressionless.

The salesman offered no comment. His interest was entirely concerned with the stores with which he was surrounded.

"When d'you pull out?" Sandy inquired conversationally.

"I go on the Bay packet on Saturday," said Lenoir, glad to get back to the matter in hand. "Can you do it in the time?"

"That's easy. Five days. I'll only need three for the outfit. Less, on the rush. I s'pose you'll go by the Keewin River?"

Lenoir smiled eagerly.

"Yes. I make Bear Point on the packet. I pick up a Mission outfit there. Then by way of the Keewin to Moon Lake.

Hantock emitted a low whistle.

" It's a hell of a piece to Green Lake. Why, it must be seven hundred miles and more from here. What sort of Mission outfit ? "

" Just one riverman and a stout craft."

" I see." Sandy shook his head till the lank grey thatch of it waved in the air. " I've packed a big pile of stuff one way and another for Green Lake about two years back. I had a river train of ten boats makin' it. Gee ! It's a lone territory for a man. Well, anyway, I'll fix things right for you, Mr Lenoir. When d'you fancy seeing to your—personal ? "

Lenoir had no desire for delay. The selection of that outfit was a joyous anticipation.

" Why, I'd be glad to now," he said, with modest appeal. " If—if it's convenient ? "

" Convenient ? Why, sure." Hantock showed his gilded teeth again. " Business is always convenient to me. Just stand by while I hail my boy." He turned and called back " Ho, you ! Mateau ! " he shouted.

Without waiting for reply he turned to where an assistant was at work.

" Say where the—You, Sim, go beat up Mr Mateau right away. Maybe he's—" Then, as a slim, dark half-breed, clad with a neatness and refinement that contrasted grotesquely with the man who was reputed to be worth a million dollars, came hurriedly from somewhere amidst the sea of stores, he countermanded his order. " Never mind, Sim. You get right on with that stuff, an' don't use those cans of crackers the same as if they were building slabs."

The clerk, Mateau, took possession of the missionary. And the manner of it had the ease of well-oiled machinery. The quietly approving glance of Hantock's eyes followed the two men till they became lost amongst the merchandise. Then the trader turned as the voice of the salesman made comment.

" They lose no time, these Mission-folk," he said. " It was only yesterday word came down the coast of this man, Arden. And that boy goes to take his place on—Saturday."

Sandy's grey locks shook.

"You don't get that Bible outfit losin' a thing," he said grimly. "And there's no sort of change for a dollar in their dealings. Say, it beats me the way they jolly those boys so they fancy the sort of life you get on Green Lake. To mother the heathen! God! I haven't seen any heathen around this north country needs motherin'—an' still less fatherin'. I tell you, right here, I'd be mighty glad to pull that College of theirs down, a sort o' mausoleum over their fool bodies, even though it robbed me of their trade. Psha!"

He turned and moved back towards the glass-partitioned office which was his private sanctum.

"Let's get right back. We need to make a talk on that proposition of yours."

CHAPTER XI

JIMMY PATON RECEIVES AN OFFER

"I THOUGHT I'd find you in this horrible place cooking some of your poisonous stinks, Jimmy. How does it go?"

Dr James Paton, who would scarcely have recognized his given name had he heard it at full length, raised a pair of twinkling eyes from their intent scrutiny of a queer shaped vessel, steaming over a wood-alcohol flame.

His smile encountered a neat, slight figure surmounted by a keen dark face. And the whole was clad in the summer uniform of an officer of the Royal Mounted Police.

"The trouble is, Dick, a civilian doctor's job on Lake Athaba don't provide me with much else to do but cook up the juices we're both interested in. You folks are too healthy, and hate civilians anyway. And the red-skinned aboriginals and hard-living half-breeds haven't anything particular to pay with except thanks and grins, till you hate the sight of inferior quality teeth. I wouldn't call my cooking savoury. But it fills out a hell of a lot of time and supplies us both with hope when healthy humanity don't need something to clean out their stomachs. And some day——"

There was a laugh. An infectious laugh, which somehow conveyed no infection to the man who heard it. Then the speaker became absorbed with the thermometer in his grimy hand.

Inspector Richard Ferrers left the doorway and came to the makeshift bench, which ran the entire length of the long, low, log shanty which was the young doctor's home-

made laboratory. It was littered with a collection of chemical impedimenta. He thrust all sorts of glass tubes and bottles and retorts on one side and leapt to a seat on the badly stained woodwork.

The officer commanding the police detachment at Fort Marie, on Lake Athaba, and Dr Jimmy Paton were inseparable friends. Their friendship had been inevitable from the moment the youthful policeman took over command of the post. Both were at the outset of their careers. Both saw interest and humour in everything about them. Both were full of the best human honesty and cleanness of mind. They played together, they sat and smoked together. And the dreams of each were always coloured by a lifelong association the one with the other.

From a worldly point of view Inspector Ferrers was undoubtedly the better off, the better positioned. For him the future, to a large extent, was clearly scheduled. With reasonable capacity he would automatically progress in rank and pay. On the other hand, Dr Jimmy Paton, a gold medallist at the hospitals, a young, enthusiastic, brilliant brain, looked to have little but his meagre income, and that with which enthusiastic work, and two extraordinarily powerful hands, could provide him.

It was one of Ferrers's constantly expressed complaints against his friend that he had wilfully denied himself the opportunity to which his brilliant talents entitled him. The foremost student of his year, a man with abnormal faculties for chemical research, he had wilfully cut himself adrift from the world where grew the plums of his profession, and had withdrawn to a region where medical practice was only of that general order that could be dealt with by any man of ordinary degrees. The policeman felt it to be an outrage against priceless gifts, and did not hesitate to say so. Furthermore, he openly deplored the laws of inheritance that had given the young doctor an income sufficient to rob him of the driving necessity to sell his wares in the most profitable market.

That was certainly the fact of Dr Jimmy Paton. He had sought out the most remote spot in the northern world where practice existed. But his idea, which looked so ridiculous, had in reality profound purpose. He possessed but one desire in the world. It was for a life of uninterrupted chemical research. Any medical practice in a city would absorb all his time and energy. He had seen himself up day and night assisting in the ridiculous work of over-populating an already far too crowded world. He loathed the idea of a life of reassuring those obsessed with a chronic fear of cancer. He hated distributing aperient mixtures to those who habitually overate themselves. And as for the nervous disorders of those who persistently outraged Nature, he saw no particular reason why they should not be left to endure the fruits of their moral lapses. An amiably disposed aunt had considerately ceased to exist and lecture him, and, in terminating these things, had endowed him with some two thousand five hundred dollars a year.

So he had headed forthwith for Lake Athaba where there was a sufficient native population upon which to try his 'prentice hand, and the primitive conditions of life calculated to leave him free to pursue his investigations without interruption. Then there was something else there, and about which, besides himself, the only man who knew was Dick Ferrers.

"Still the oil stunt?"

Jimmy's good-looking head inclined.

"Can't you smell it?"

"I certainly can." Ferrers drew a pipe from somewhere within his black patrol jacket, filled it with coarse-cut tobacco, and lit it. "Think you'll ever get it?"

The chemist's tall body straightened. And the grey eyes which surveyed the policeman were without a twinkle.

"Sure," he said emphatically. "Just as sure as—death."

Ferrers continued to blow smoke for some moments.

"Then I s'pose we'll have to grab a derelict coal mine—they'll all be derelict soon—and hand out gasoline to a motor-

crazy world at one cent a gallon. You chemists are a bad bunch. You're just turning a romantic world into a ghastly nightmare. You dream things that aren't wholesome and transform them into realities."

" And the man with capital, the man who's simply devoted himself to collecting a large bunch of slips of dirty paper he couldn't even manufacture himself, comes along and robs the dreamer. You know, Dick, I'm wondering how much capital my aunt's legacy represents. And how I could transform my mouldy income into bulk money."

Ferrers grinned.

" So the capitalist shan't rob you ? "

" Something like that."

Jimmy extinguished the wood-alcohol flame, and laid his thermometer aside. Then he sat himself in a chair whose sapling spruce manufacture displayed his own handicraft. He, too, lit his pipe.

" What's brought you, Dick ? " he asked abruptly. " It's only eleven o'clock. You're only just through with your Orderly Room."

Ferrers laughed.

" Oh, just to yarn."

The chemist shook his head.

" Not at this hour of the day."

" Fact."

" What's the yarn ? "

Each in his own way was a good-looking creature. While Ferrers was slight and only mid-way between five and six feet, as became a mounted policeman, the chemist was tall and immensely powerful. His face was lean and well-featured. And his unparted hair, which was light in colour, had in it a natural wave that kept it close to his head.

" About this bulk money you were talking of," Ferrers adverted, ignoring his question. " I see your point. But you can't afford to use up the source that gives you a living so you can carry on with your ' stinks.' No, boy, if you get this thing we've got to act different. Oh, we've got to get

bulk money someway all right. Now I've got a bit of capital. It's not as much as yours, I guess. But mine's free. I've got my pay, you see. Now, if you were a police Doc. on the pay-roll your capital would be free, too. We could both realize—capitalize they call it—bunch it together, and —there you are."

"Fine!" Jimmy's laugh came spontaneously. "But I'm not a police Doc., and I haven't heard they're asking for me. Try again, Dick."

"But they might, if you felt like acting wise—for once."

"Ah, I was wondering why you'd cut out your stable parade and come along over here."

Jimmy's eyes were twinkling again.

"I told you, to—yarn."

"Then get to it. Tell me how they're asking for me."

"How'd you fancy a trip?"

"Not a little bit."

"If you like to make a big trip you can get an appointment as a police Doc. at the end of it. I've got that from Ottawa."

"But leave this—now?"

The twinkle had vanished again as the chemist gazed at his assorted gear on the bench.

"It'll keep. Think. A definite appointment. Then your capital—both our capitals—will be free to—bunch."

"Tell me about it."

Ferrers smiled. He liked the cool, direct fashion in which Jimmy Paton never failed to consider any problem with which he was confronted. In Ferrers's judgment he was the coolest man on earth. There was never any hesitation. And equally never any headlong rushing to extremes. There were times when the policeman deplored the chances which had robbed the force to which he belonged of such an officer as he felt Jimmy would undoubtedly have made.

"I've had a pretty tough report from that boy, Corporal Spence, on Green Lake," he said thoughtfully. "I didn't tell you at the time for a pretty good reason. Half the settlement up there is either dying or dead of an epidemic they

call ' fly.' The missionary's just gone under with it. I got word more than a week back."

He paused and smoked with his gaze dwelling on the fantastic equipment of the makeshift but efficient aboratory.

" Now that boy, Spence, is a thoroughly capable and efficient officer. And when he starts to squeal I'm quite convinced there's something badly amiss," he went on presently. " Since we haven't a Doc. of our own here, and it was useless sending up a police patrol, I did the only thing possible. I wired headquarters the position, and suggested you in emergency. They got Ottawa, with the result I'm told to invite you to make the trip at special fees. But the essence of the thing is, they've seen wisdom for once. If you agree to go they're prepared to appoint you Police Surgeon here after you get back, and put you on the recognized pay-roll."

If Inspector Ferrers looked for any expression of joy he was to be disappointed. Jimmy Paton went on smoking without a sign. So he was forced to continue :

" In spite of the fact I'm dealing with one of the foolish ones, who doesn't know better than to start medical practice in a place where there's nothing between perfect health and death, I sort of felt I was acting fairy godfather to you. Then I had myself to consider. You see, Jimmy, if you're going to pull this oil stunt off successfully we've got to be in a right financial position when the time comes. I'm out for the goods. I want that million of money I'm to make alongside you. Your job's cooking bad smells. Mine's the high finance of it. This Doc. appointment looks like short circuiting things for us both."

It was all said in a light, half-bantering fashion. But the gaze that looked into the chemist's steady eyes at the finish was serious enough, and eager.

There was no hesitation. Again the officer had a demonstration of the chemist's decisive methods.

" I'll go, Dick," he said.

And from the manner of it Jimmy might have been accepting a case that would occupy him five minutes or so.

Ferrers grinned.

"I knew you would, boy. Thanks."

The fair head nodded casually.

"That's all right. Now tell me about this 'fly,'" Jimmy smiled. "I guess it's not laid down in the hospital schedule of diseases."

Ferrers became thoughtfull Then he gestured a little helplessly.

"I can't tell you a thing beyond what Spence says," he began at last. "As I told you, Spence is a reliable officer. And he don't easily squeal. He says this disease is rampant. And the outward demonstration of it is rather like small-pox. Hitherto it's only attacked the Indians. But he's got seriously alarmed, and says it's altogether a queer show. There's stuff in his report that won't interest you. Police stuff we needn't deal with now. You see, he's quite efficient. He hints at phases he doesn't want to emphasize too strongly until he's sure, and would rather not talk about till a doctor's studied the subject. Altogether I read some sort of mystery between the lines of his report, but which he doesn't want to exaggerate. I make out that there's something so wrong up there that I even contemplated sending for him to come down here and make a clear report. But on reflection I realized we should arrive at the best and quickest result by having a qualified doctor make the full report. You see, it's many hundreds of miles to Green Lake."

Jimmy Paton stood up and knocked out his pipe.

"That sounds good sense," he said. "It's clearly a case either for doctor or the police. And by what he says I take it it's mainly doctor. When do you want me to go?"

Inspector Ferrers slid himself off the bench, and his face expressed relief and cordiality.

"You're a good pal, Jimmy," he said, with earnest approval. "Right away, if you don't mind. We'll outfit you, of course. I'll give you one of our new motor-boats,

and the finest river scout we've got in the post. You quite understand you can't possibly get back till the end of summer, unless this sickness is nothing much. If you miss that it means a year. And about that mystery I read into Spence's letter. Maybe there isn't one at all. But if there is, and you think it's liable to be of police interest, go right ahead with it as far as you can without help. You're just the sort of inquiring creature that's liable to be of colossal assistance. That is if—there *is* any mystery."

Jimmy laughed.

"Dr Watson was a marvellous chap in helping S. Holmes, Esq., Anyway, I'll do all I know. But what about the gas supply for the boat?" He turned to re-light his wood-alcohol lamp.

"We'll outfit you with enough to make Bluff Lake. You can pick up all you want from the trader there. He's a contractor for us. He supplies Spence."

Jimmy nodded.

"Anything else," he added, bending over his retort.

The policeman accepted his dismissal with a laugh.

"Right ho, Jimmy! I won't waste more of your time. After all, oil is more important to you and me. Oh, by the way," he added, suddenly diving into an inner pocket, "I nearly forgot."

The chemist let his match burn out while he waited.

Ferrers produced a small pill box carefully wrapped and sealed in paper, and passed it across to the waiting man.

"It's just a small quantity of the stuff we found on that boy our patrol picked up. He was shot to death in his boat on the river you remember. I pinched it out of a five pound parcel he had with him. I don't know anything about the muck, but there's orders from Ottawa—urgent orders—to every police post in the country to look out for the stuff, and to arrest anyone found with it. No matter in what quantity. They seem to have shot right up into the air about it. There's a reward of fifty thousand dollars for the discovery of its source; its place of manufacture. And that

fifty thousand dollars has made me kind of curious. It seemed to me it might be something in your line. So——"

"Fifty thousand dollars?"

Jimmy took the little parcel and tore the paper from it. Then he very deliberately raised the lid from the box. For several silent moments he stood gazing down at the pale green powder it contained.

The policeman watched the tall, athletic figure with its gaze so deeply concentrated. But for so long did the chemist consider the powder that the other became impatient.

"Maybe you'll have time to analyse it, Jimmy," he said.

And instantly the grey eyes were raised. The look was one such as the other had never before beheld in them. It was an expression of profound revolting.

"I don't need to, Dick," he said, with a sharp intake of breath. "Where's the rest of it?"

"Gone to Ottawa."

"And the man is dead?"

"Shot to death in his boat when we found him."

"Pity. Where did you get him?"

"At the mouth of the Marie River, where it comes out of Moon Lake."

"Where d'you think he came from?"

"North. Sure. He was a river breed who goes north every year. Some sort of trader. Pelts, I guess."

"Would he by any chance come from around Green Lake?"

The incisiveness of the question startled the policeman.

"Can't say. The northern inlet to Moon Lake is the Moon River, which is merely a continuation of the great Thelon River, which in turn flows through Green Lake. He might, of course, have come from that way."

Jimmy Paton shut the box very deliberately and laid it on his bench.

"I'm glad you didn't forget, Dick," he said, with a shadowy smile. "And I'm glad you were criminally in-

clined, and stole a pinch of that powder and brought it to me. I know all about that stuff. You see, I learned my chemistry from Professor Warren Kenyon, the head of the Norland Dyes Corporation, and the founder and head of the Kenyon College of Chemistry. Oh, yes! I know all about it."

"What is it?"

The question came hot with curiosity.

"Alphaine! Known amongst chemists as 'courage dope.' The worst, the foulest, the ghastliest drug in the world. The secret of it, if ever generally known, would be a discovery that might well devastate the whole wide world of men and women."

CHAPTER XII

THE TRADER ON THE LAKE

"You're talkin' darn foolishness, Kate!"

Vannie Smith looked up from the depths of his stout canoe. He spat over the side. Then he twisted round and his unlovely eyes followed the woman's movements about the pile of camp outfit on the landing, which was waiting to be stowed.

The man's unloveliness had nothing to do with expression. That was meditatively tolerant, and even good-natured. It was the narrow setting of his eyes. Their smallness, and the keen blackness of them, which so readily sparkled in response to the hot vigour of the mind behind.

The woman stooped and picked up a neat roll of blankets in their rubber ground-sheet as easily as she might have handled a babe. She came to the edge of the landing and passed them to her man. Then, as she watched him stow them, her round, pretty eyes grew rounder.

"It ain't foolishness, an' you know it, Vannie, boy," she cried. "It's just the best sense anyone who ain't blind, an' deaf, an' crazed fer dollars, can hand to a feller who is. You think some more while I get them kettles an' truck."

Having fired her shot she turned and ambled back to the pile of outfit. And her husband grinned after her.

The argument between husband and wife was vital. But it was without heat. Both were in deadly earnest. And each was ready to stab home convictions without concern for the manner of it. It was just their way, their habit.

Vannie Smith was a big-bodied creature. He was a mass

of bone and muscle, and without an ounce of fat. His head was small, and his face was gross, hard, and brutish. But to his wife he possessed every Apollo-like attribute that had undoubtedly been denied him by Nature. And even his hay-like hair, which had never yet known a comb, was a source of infinite pride to Kate's staunch heart.

The position was very simply natural. Kate was a woman of motherly instinct. And without children of her own she had no alternative but to mother her man. She did it with a will. She did it to such purpose that Vannie submitted to it as being the easier way. She was, in fact, one of those extremely good, worrying women who can find no happiness in life without the anxious care of some one who is more than capable of caring for themselves. Her goodness and sense of loyalty were such that if her man decided on murder hers would have been the hand to set the lethal weapon in his hand, while she told him all she thought of the folly and wickedness of his crime.

Kate had a round face and round eyes, and a body that was rounder still. She had all the buxomness of perfect health, and undeniable good looks. And for all her forty odd years, as she moved about busily under her linen sun-bonnet, arrayed in her stout, utility clothing, she looked clean, and neat, and wholesome, and was more than simply attractive to the ruffian observing her.

They were traders of the older school. They belonged to the type where the man felt himself to be a sort of monarch reigning over the territory from which he drew his revenue, and the woman looked upon their unsophisticated clientele as a sort of colourful family for which she felt herself responsible. They were a stout, fearless, and not too scrupulous example of the small army of free-traders who still had the courage to remain outside the fur-trading corporations of Canada's North.

Vannie smiled at the stooping, unconscious figure in its heavy boots and coarse, serviceable stockings and skirt. And he spat again as the preliminary to further speech.

"You always bin a fool, Kate," he said, as though he were paying her a compliment. "And," he added thoughtfully, "I guess you always will be one. Yes, you'll go right on bein' that way till they pack you up in your box suit an' dump you where most o' the world's scrap belongs. I tell you, Spence ain't worried with us. Why should he be? He don't guess a thing. You always did have spooks mazin' your queer head. If you was to start in cookin' a boiler of water you'd worry it 'ud boil over an' rust the shine off n your cookstove. Pass the cook pots next, an' quit your whinin'."

Kate collected the pots and platters without even looking round to make her reply.

"I ain't whinin'," she said, with perfect amiability. "I never did whine, an' I don't have to. The only time I'll feel that way is when they send you down to pen. for acting foolish. And maybe then I won't whine cos they'll send me along, too. You're dead wrong, boy. Spence has got something back of them quick eyes of his that don't ever miss what they shouldn't see. He's got a guess. He don't ask, an' wouldn't get answers anyway if he did. There's something. An' it's in his grin, an' his soft talk, an' the way he moves around. An' all the time I'm wonderin' who he's goin' to pull. It ain't that scares me, though. No. It's the thought this world's full of folks who're mighty glad if it's the other feller who gets set behind stone walls an' iron locks."

Vannie took the pots and laughed. And he took all the rest of the outfit and stowed it before he made any reply. Perhaps he was thinking it all out. Perhaps he felt his wife's suspicions to be not worth his consideration.

At last he stepped out of the boat. Standing on the swaying, chained-log landing beside Kate he towered monstrously in his open-throated cotton shirt and hard woven trousers held up by a studded leather belt. The man was the epitome of the remoter northern life. And the ugly great sheath knife at his back, and the empty revolver

holsters suspended at his waist, gave sure indication of his capacity.

He glanced back at the store buildings whose reed-thatched roofs showed above the green log defences built up about them. Then he searched the heat haze that obscured the northern shore of the lake. Suddenly he spat out an intrusive fly with vicious disgust.

"That's all right, Kate," he said. "You can't tell a fool nothin'—ever. Still, ther' ain't locks an' stone walls for you or me. Whatever else I ain't promisin' you, I am that."

Kate's round eyes softened. She wagged her sun-bonneted head. She, too, was gazing into the northern heat haze which obscured everything in that direction but the shimmer of sunlit water.

Bluff Lake was many degrees more congenial than the more northern Green Lake. Its shores were low. They were marshy, too. And a dank saturation always seemed to be prevailing about them. But the desolation of the region was tempered by hundreds of miles of dense primordial forests which surrounded the lake and grew down to the edge of the waters. The lake was the home of myriads of wild fowl and fish. And the brooding forests sheltered droves of browsing game.

"You don't make him out yet?" Kate asked suddenly, breaking in on the man's prolonged preoccupation.

Vannie shook his head.

"It don't signify," he said. "He's due to-day, noon. I guess it's most noon now."

Kate's eyes became more troubled as she gazed out over the water. Vannie bestirred. He thrust his hands into the waist of his trousers.

"This is another three thousand dollar trip," he said, in a tone of greedy satisfaction. "Do you get what that means, old girl? Each trip the profit gits bigger. In a year or so we'll quit the skitters an' blizzards for the sun-places, wher' you won't have to worry cep' for the worries you ain't got." He chuckled. "It ain't fer a woman to worry fer red-coats.

That's fer her man. An' I guess I'm doin' the man's job in this layout. Three thousand dollars! Makes me feel I'll wake up soon."

Kate linked a stout arm about her man's. And she struck at the flies with a disengaged hand.

"I guess you will," she said slyly. Then she added: "When it's too late. No. It ain't a dream. It's a nightmare. We seen tough days since that big boy come along and loaned haf the dollars from me to buy a weddin' ring. An' those tough days have made it seem good us bein' together. It's always been me fer you, an' you fer me, no matter what sort of foolishness you got up to, Vannie. But easy dollars ain't natural. I like 'em hard. Hard as hell. Then I know you've earned 'em right."

Vannie's laugh was good-natured only to a point.

"Fine," he cried roughly. "Sure it's them tough times. You ain't goin' to see 'em again. Get that good. And get it you're through whinin' right now. You just start right in to grin, old girl, same as you used when we hadn't fifty thousand dollars in our bank roll. Ther's Bucket!"

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It was sheer business without a spare word. Bucket's canoe was at the landing made fast beside Vannie's. The two men were at work with silent haste.

Bucket's sleek, fair head, with its pale eyes and thin features, wore an alert, tense look. He moved in that eager fashion that tells of apprehension. The man's every sense was alive. Ears and eyes were straining and watchful.

Vannie was in no less urgent mood. And as he worked he remembered that word "nightmare" which his wife had used.

Kate took no active part in the work. She just looked on, with eyes whose roundness left her pupils staring. At that moment she hated the thought of three thousand dollars more than ever. But more even than those dollars she hated the man, Bucket.

Her woman's wit told her the man he was. She knew he belonged to another world than her own. His original social plane was far removed from hers. But she knew he was bad. She distrusted those cold, pale eyes; the high cheekbones, and thin high-bridged nose. Were they not of Indian shape? Did they not suggest the great eagle or even more so the merciless vulture? She hated Vannie's association with this coldly calculating detrimental.

The work was completed in less than half an hour. Bucket's outfit was returned to its place in his boat. The other looked exactly as it had been at the moment of the arrival, except that Vannie was amidships waiting with his paddle athwart the boat, ready to his hand. Bucket was on the landing.

"You need to be bright this trip, Vannie," he said, in his quiet drawling fashion. "You want an eye skinned as never before. Spence is right behind me on the river. But it's not that so much. There's a police boat coming up, and I don't know how soon, or who's in it. It's up to you to lose it. See? But if you don't, why, you've got to dump quick. You get me? Dump everything. You see, that boat's coming because Spence needs it. If he needs it you —can't tell. I'm going to follow you down a piece, and lie off while Spence is around. Then I'll be here when you get back with the dough. Get it?"

Vannie's eyes glittered as he nodded. And Kate, watching him, offered up a silent prayer.

"I'll miss it," he growled confidently. "Ther' won't be any dumpin'. If the boy on Moon Lake's there, I'll be along back to schedule."

Bucket's gaze was uneasy as he turned it northward.

"That's all right," he said coldly. "Beat it. And remember, if they get wise, shoot. An' shoot to kill!"

. . . . .

Kate was alone with Bucket. That was one of her griefs about this work that meant so much to her man. The cold

evil of Bucket made her sicken, and even frightened the woman in her.

He was preparing to follow in Vannie's wake, but had paused to light a cigarette. He glanced at her over the match flame.

"Vannie's a big bunch for them to hit up against," he said by way of pleasantry.

Kate's lips set hard. Then they parted.

"It looks like you're passin' that boy the dirt of this trip," she said.

Bucket dropped the match into the water, and inhaled deeply.

"Does it?" He shrugged, and there was nothing pleasant in his pale eyes. "We've all got to earn our pay. Sometimes it's easy. Sometimes—Say, from here to way north of the Gateway is Spence's territory. He's there all the time, and I've to keep his blinds down, and other folks' as well. We're all in the game. And if it's a show down we've got to win out. This looks like being Vannie's first sight of trouble. Mine's all the time. So long, Missis. I'll see you later, when it's time to collect. Vannie knows his job. And, if he's wise, he'll—do it."

Kate watched him go. She watched till the first bend of the great river hid him from view. One of the things Kate most hated in life was a spider. And when Bucket passed out of sight she felt as though she had been watching the movements of a spider on her bed-cover, and Vannie had at last come along and removed it for her.

CHAPTER XIII

ON MOON LAKE

Vannie Smith had all the nerve of a great criminal, but by no means the essential qualities of mind to complete the specimen. His trouble in the latter direction was that his shortage of scruple was not inherent. It was a development, resulting from the circumstances of a life cast in hard places. Undoubtedly Vannie Smith had been intended for an honest man.

Vannie Smith had known every buffet that life could inflict. Brought into the world by parents whose only excuse for propagation was physical fitness, he had been denied from the very beginning any of the advantages to which human nature feels itself entitled. Without education, without any financial resources whatever, without any happy social influence or religious guidance, he had just grown to a splendid physical manhood in spite of everything.

And the result was more fortunate than the most optimistic could have anticipated. With every encounter against adversity he had battled his way to a greater courage, a greater fitness and will to survive. Until at last, possessed of a woman, whom, in his rough, human way, he adored, he found himself concentrated on but a single purpose. A niche in the world's "sun-places," where he could set up his temple of worship, and enthrone his not inconsiderable goddess.

Money! Competence! His whole heart and will were centred on wresting ample provision for old age from the legions of life arrayed against him.

One of the great truths of life which Vannie had gleaned, and thoroughly digested, was the fact that honest work, while it had certain advantages, also found an infinity of competition. Furthermore, he had discovered that it only possessed a definite, calculable market value. And the sum of it all, from his viewpoint, was not at all alluring.

On the other hand, work where grave social risk was incurred, while it required an astute unscruple to bring to a profitable fruition, certainly afforded the possibilities of big results. And, seeing big results were his aim, it required no further consideration as to the plane upon which the all too brief period of his sturdy life was to move.

Then Bucket's warning of a police boat on the river was no more to him than a small cloud on the summer sky of his prospects. He would have remained unconcerned if a dozen such boats were on the river, and all of them were seeking to capture him and his cargo. Bucket's coolly imparted directions as to his, Vannie's, actions in emergency, likewise meant no more to him than empty words. This trip was another big stride towards the goal at which he aimed. So, his were the wits, his the nerve, his the resource that would inevitably govern the issue.

Vannie on the river was an education in efficient manhood. He had the endurance of two men, and the daring associated with the most reckless. And then, behind his black, small eyes was the nimble calculation of a brain that never rested in face of risk and danger. Furthermore, deep in a strong heart that was never disturbed out of its even beat, there lay the cold courage of one who understands that the measure of reward is in exact proportion to the individual's capacity to win through.

Rain, and wind, and cyclonic summer storming were no deterrents to the trader's journey to Moon Lake. They were the elements he knew by heart, and for which he entertained a profound contempt. They were the A.B.C. of a riverman's life, and were accepted with stoic philosophy. Besides, the more inclement the weather the more easily he

knew he could defeat the vigilance of those in the police boat. But Bucket's warning proved wholly unnecessary. Vannie encountered not a living soul on his journey down to Moon Lake.

A week's hard driving landed him on the low mud shores of a veritable inland sea. For Moon Lake was at once the source, or draining basin, of four of the great northern rivers. There was no question as to his destination. That, like all the rest, was carefully appointed. He made for the low, massive headland which was the only break of its kind on the dreary shores, and pitched his camp in the secret place it provided.

It was a grey stone cavern with an obscure opening, set in the base of the headland behind a tatter of broken rock on the foreshore. It not only served to diffuse the smoke of his camp-fire before it reached the open air, but provided him with hiding for his stout canoe. And in this fashion his presence on the lake was reduced to the simple fact of arrival and complete disappearance.

The rest was equally carefully planned and executed organization for which the trader was in no way responsible. But the manner of it claimed his unstinted admiration. Experience had taught him there would be no hitch. He had never known a hitch. So he was content to set himself to wait and watch, in the full assurance of his own easy profit.

It was on the sixth day that his work was finally completed. He knew it would be at the time of the morning or evening mists on the Lake. On this occasion it proved to be the evening. There came the fierce "chug" of a powerful motor-boat. Then the craft loomed up, a long, narrow, half-decked boat built to encounter the fiercest storms that descended upon the northern lakes. It ran to its berth amongst the titanic rocks with all the ease of confidence and familiarity. And the leather-clad, goggle-masked pilot leapt ashore. He joined Vannie in his cavern hiding. Then came half an hour's hurried work for both men. And

in less than an hour from the moment of the vessel's arrival, the motor-boat had vanished whence it came, and Vannie was left with a great roll of money stowed in the waterproof belt that encircled the bare flesh of his waist.

With the going of the motor-boat Vannie squatted himself on the rocks, and, without concern for concealment, lit his pipe. He sat there in the saturating mist indifferent to all discomfort. And, after awhile, his gaze turned in a westerly direction, and he listened.

Several times he re-lit his pipe. Then, at last, he rose from his seat and hurried back to his cavern. There was a definite question in the eyes that reluctantly abandoned the direction of their gaze.

He moved with real haste, and remained lost in his cavern shelter for nearly an hour. When he re-appeared he was shouldering his canoe. He carried it down to the great pool which was his landing and floated it. Then he passed up again and returned to the boat loaded with his outfit.

The boat was ready, and Vannie glanced about him. His gaze searched his tracks back to the cavern. There was nothing. Nothing had been forgotten, nothing dropped, nothing at all to betray the fact of his camp there. It was the same, he knew, inside the cavern. He had carefully eliminated every trace.

Again he turned in a westerly direction and stood listening. It was queer. He was wondering if the mist on the lake had power to deaden sound, or if, on the contrary, it exaggerated it. Somehow he could not be sure. There was a sound. And it was louder now than when he had first heard it. Well, it would be foolish to take chances. If it were Bucket's police boat he had no desire to encounter it. The last thing he wanted was to answer the questions that would certainly be put to him. He dropped into his canoe and dipped his paddle.

. . . . .

Vannie's fresh camp was on the eastern foreshore of the lake. It was where a sweep of primordial forest came down

off the highland which formed the tail of the great watershed rising between two rivers. To the eastward, in full view, lay the troubled surface of churning rapids where the waters fell away into the mouth of the gorge which carried the Keewin River along its meandering course to the shores of Hudson's Bay. To the westward was the wide open mouth of his own home river, with its twisted currents and treacherous banks of mud and silt.

It was early morning. A chill breeze had already swept the night mists clear, and a glorious sun had risen into a cloudless sky from its bed of fine weather cloud.

Vannie was searching the distance to the eastward of him in a mood not untouched with irritability. He was not concerned. Simply annoyed. He had made camp on one of his most favoured hunting grounds, where the migratory wild-fowl usually broke their journey to feed. He had looked to replenish his larder with a goose or two, and perhaps a goodly mallard. And now he realized the hopelessness of it. Away to the east of him, somewhere beyond the rapids, a dense black cloud of smoke was rising to the drift of the breeze. There was an outfit on the Keewin River. And it left not one chance in a hundred that the birds would come down to feed.

He turned in disgust. And as he did so a startled ejaculation broke from him. Another spiral of smoke was drifting on the breeze to the westward of him, and there was no doubt as to the locality of the camp from which it was rising. But it was different from the other. A mere wisp. And it was at the headland which he had abandoned over-night. His lips pursed, and he gave vent to a low whistle.

"Police!" he muttered. And he watched the smoke, fascinated.

Vannie's thought flowed swiftly. What crazy chance had made the police pick out that headland for their night camp? But even as he asked himself the question he found the answer. It was the obvious place for them to choose on that barren shore. He wondered. He tried to visualize the

place as he had left it. Would they find traces ? He thought not. He had even buried the remains of his fire under the driftweed he had found. No.

But somehow he did not feel very confident. He knew these red-coats had eyes that missed very little. Anyway, seeing that their night had been passed at his old camping-ground he had less desire than ever to encounter them. No. There was nothing to gain, and he had no desire to take unnecessary risk. He would get out at once. But——

He glanced at the mouth of his own river and shook his head. To return home now would be to have them pass him in their fast motor-boat. That would defeat his purpose. He must let them go first. Then he would follow at his leisure. But he must break camp at once. Where ?

He turned to the drift smoke at the head of the Keewin. Of a sudden he laughed shortly, and turned back to where his outfit was littered round his dead camp-fire.

In a few minutes his canoe was slipping out towards the rapids. He would investigate the camp on the Keewin with its column of dense smoke. Then he would return home when the police boat had taken its departure from the lake.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SILENCE BROKEN

Jimmy Paton lounged at the tiller. Even his big body was glad enough of the ease of it. A motor-boat was the most wonderful thing in the world on the northern rivers, until it came to portage. Well, he and Sandy Alexander had just completed a gruelling four miles portage, and he was glad to sprawl himself, relaxing his muscles, with no greater call upon him than the guidance of the " chugging " craft on a river that was deep, and wide, and generous of fairway.

The heat of the day was tempered by the lightest of breezes. But it was insufficient to disperse the legions of flies and mosquitoes, which, in their blood lust, pursued the boat relentlessly. They attacked from every side and victory was unquestionably theirs. But they left Jimmy all unconcerned. He was innured to them. He did not even trouble to smash the grey mass voraciously absorbing his life-blood from the back of his neck.

The drone of the engine under Sandy Alexander's watchful care had a somnolent effect on the man at the stern of the boat. Weariness, the heat of the day, and the drone of the machine brought him very near slumber. Certainly he was dreaming Dreaming of coal and oil. And of the big thing he hoped he and Dick Ferrers would some day launch upon a surprised and even shocked world. And of the squeal he knew would come from those who had managed to snatch control of the world's oil wells. His mood was one of profound content.

There were moments, however, when his dream was

interrupted. It was when a pair of reproachful, coal-black eyes were raised from their watch on the engine to flash smiling protest at him for the uncertain drift of the boat's course.

At last the riverman's mute censure brought forth expostulation. Jimmy bestirred himself, and laughed as he headed the boat into the slack of the head stream out of which he had allowed it to drift.

"Don't feel worried, Sandy," he said quietly. "This river's about as dead safe as anything you'll find north of 60°. Your engine's feeling easy tempered. And so long as she acts that way we shan't carry back over the falls behind us. You believe me, I'd hate to pass your dandy wife, back in Athaba, the doleful tidings of your decease by drowning under the Moon River falls. Moon River! I wonder why?"

The half-breed grinned down at his beloved engine, and noted its regular firing with satisfaction. Jimmy really amused him.

Jimmy returned to his dreaming. But it was no longer of coal and oil. He found himself thinking of the name of the river they were on, and the lake they had not long since crossed. And he wondered at the lunatics who had christened them.

His recollection of the lake was of a storm-swept waste calculated to harass an ocean-going craft; of two days of fog on its shores that would blind anyone but a northern riverman; of an escape from imminent disaster on rocks that seemed to him to have no right on the low mud shores that had looked to be without relief in any direction. Then, for the first time in his life, he had known sea-sickness. Why Moon Lake?

Since then, thirty miles of Moon River. It seemed to him more like a hundred. But he accepted Sandy Alexander's estimate. Then the falls, which had looked to rival Niagara, and the four miles of portage they had necessitated. And the world in which these things were was grey, and

flat, and almost barren. Blazing heat in the day and chill nights that bit to the bone. A few sparsely set trees, yes. Some low scrub. Just sufficient to afford shelter for the reserve legions of mosquitoes, and to emphasize the general air of sterility prevailing. So why Moon River ?

At any rate Jimmy was content enough just now. Bodily discomfort was a small thing. He was young, and strong, and of unusual physical and mental energy. And his whole purpose just now was to reach Green Lake and serve his friend, Dick Ferrers.

Sandy Alexander had been inclined to doubt his charge's capacity at the outset. He knew him to be a doctor. Had Jimmy not helped to bring his only offspring into the world ? After all, a doctor would not be expected to understand the northern river trail. But after the gruelling portage of a heavy boat, and a double journey under a weighty load of outfit, his last doubts had been dispelled. It had been Jimmy who had built the night fire and cooked their food while he had sat, and rested, and smoked, worn threadbare with the weary labours of the day.

Jimmy was gazing without interest into the silent melancholy of the world ahead of them. The river was a great heavy stream more than a quarter of a mile wide. It had no beauty. It was just grey and sullen with the mud washed out of its low, marshy banks. Somewhere ahead he saw the approach of a big bend away to the eastward. And where the bend occurred there was a low line of wind-swept forest. Could it be a serious change in the aspect of this drab monotony ? Jimmy hoped and sat up.

Sandy Alexander was gazing ahead, too. His black eyes were keenly watchful. For the moment his care of his engine was secondary. But then he knew every yard of this unmapped northern artery. Narrows lay immediately ahead. Narrows lying between steep banks which marked the highway through a wide belt of forest. And in those narrows were many traps which a mere doctor could not be expected to appreciate or know. Already the oily smoothness of the

heavy stream had given way to an unease that was sufficiently ominous.

As they neared the bend Jimmy casually obeyed the common law of the river. He headed for the right bank, seeking the slacker water. As the vessel nosed across the half-breed turned.

" Full-stream," he cried. " Kep him on the left."

The man's sharpness and urgency produced instant obedience. But it also brought forth question.

" Why ? " Jimmy asked, as the boat yawed back to the outer side of the bend.

Sandy pointed to the swirl under the left bank.

' Shoal," he said.

And Jimmy eyed without friendliness the danger he had cleared with so little to spare.

Now their speed had dropped. The sturdy engine was fighting the head of water with all the power Sandy could give it. Their progress was almost negligible. But slowly, very slowly, the narrows swallowed them up, and, while the stream raced past them, the high banks and the aisles of gloomy forest slowly drifted by.

" Soon we pull 'em across," Sandy said, with a gesture towards the right bank.

Jimmy accepted the assurance without question.

" Just say when," he agreed contentedly.

Sandy's eyes were glued on the churning water. And as they progressed, the whole character of the river changed. Now it was a speeding, leaping torrent between high banks on which the pinewoods grew down to the very edge of the water. The glare of sunlight had gone. And in its place was a pleasant shade that was dank with the forest reek. They were in a completely transformed world. To Jimmy's mind a more pleasant world ; or it would be when Sandy's watchful gaze could be withdrawn from the leaping surface of the water race.

Sandy lifted a hand. It gestured across the river.

" Now ! " he cried.

The vessel's nose swung out of the stream. There was a moment of rocking. Then, as the little craft steadied on easier water, Jimmy made out the great whaleback of a greasy mud bar which he had just avoided.

Sandy was at his engine. He was throttling it, thankfully relieving it of the full pressure under which it had been driving. They were out of the big stream, and the river banks were gliding rapidly by.

"That was a bad patch," Jimmy nodded approvingly. "You'd got it to a yard."

The half-breed grinned his satisfaction at the praise.

"He wreck dis craft," he said. "Then we walk——"

But the destination of the walk he proposed was never told. A rifle shot split the dank hush of the brooding woods. A bullet whistled past Jimmy's head and buried itself in the water-race. And even as it whistled a second shot cracked on its heels. There was an ugly rending of woodwork and the boat rocked to the impact. But even before it steadied its nose had swung to the tiller in Jimmy's hand. It was racing for the bank whence the shots had been fired.

Before the bank was reached two more shots crashed the silence. And so swift was their succession that the word "magazine" flashed through Jimmy's brain. One of the shots bored the side of the boat above the water-line. The other went badly wide.

Jimmy snatched his service automatic from his pocket. And, as the nose of the boat snubbed into the soft mud of the bank, and swung to the stream, he leapt ashore.

. . . . .

Jimmy Paton's man hunt lasted less than an hour. Without a second's consideration he recklessly drove his way through the screen of undergrowth protecting the bank. The risk he was incurring never entered his head. The cowardliness of the ambush had set him ablaze with bitter wrath.

But the coverts drew blank; or almost so.

Now he was standing beside a storm-blasted tree. It was sprawled with its limbs crashed, and its knotted roots thrust up in the air. Beyond lay the river, behind the dense screen of scrub where the grey sheen of its waters was visible as they raced by. He was gazing down at that which lay in the palm of his hand. Four spent brass cartridges.

Their identity was beyond question. They were newly fired. And the name of their make was sharply stamped in their heads. Mauser. They had been fired from a Mauser magazine rifle.

From the cartridges his gaze passed to the many foot-prints in the moist soil behind the tree-trunk. These were fresh, and sharp, and quite distinct. They were large. But they were clearly the imprints of rubber overshoes.

No. They were hardly likely to tell much. Rubber overshoes. A white man. Yes. But the Mauser shells told that already.

Suddenly he took up a position with his elbows on the tree-trunk. He levelled his automatic at the surface of the river and stood peering over the gun sight. Then he lowered the weapon and grinned contemptuously.

His conclusion was that his assailant was either in a desperate hurry, or an extraordinarily bad shot. If the man had done his work, as he, Jimmy, felt he could have done it, he would not now be standing on that river bank criticising his cowardly adversary. He should be drifting down river to make a swift descent of the great falls that lay a few miles back.

He pocketed the shells and made his way back to the waiting Sandy Alexander.

CHAPTER XV

JIMMY ASKS A QUESTION

The trader's worried wife had finished her long day's work. The last of an endless succession of chores had been put behind her. She watched the reluctant Indians pass out of the store, and presently followed them. Then she closed up the place and secured the door, and, turning her face to the river, ambled slowly down to the waterside. Spence, at his camp in the shelter of a pine bluff at the water's edge, saw her coming.

The policeman's visit to Bluff Lake was quite in the usual course of his ordinary requirements. He had made that plain immediately on his arrival. Quite plain. He needed a large supply of gasoline. And Vannie's was the depot from which he must draw it. But Spence had already been ten days camped on the river. And so far he had made no attempt to supply his stated needs.

For many months Kate's mind had been subject to disturbance on the smallest provocation. All the joy of effort and looking forward had somehow gone out of her. Hers had always been a cheerful courage in adversity, a courage that saw a smile in every difficulty, and found joy in the simple fact of life. But that was when she had nothing on her frankly honest mind that she could not proclaim to all the world. Now it was different. For two years she had lived in a mental condition that made her ready to start at every sound, to see threat in every shadow. She was gravely troubled now at Spence's prolonged and unexpected stay.

Spence's camp was a simple A tent pitched on the river

bank. It was some hundred yards or more to the north of the landing. There was a smoulder of fire nearby, and his boat was drawn up from the water and bestowed in the cool shade of the bluff. Scattered about on the bushy scrub his blankets were spread out to the attentions of the sun and air. For the rest the usual litter lay strewn about, and a camp kettle of stewing food savoured pleasantly on the air. Spence himself was seated on a fallen tree-trunk where the drift of smoke from his fire kept the mosquitoes at bay.

The man's contemplative gaze seemed to be absorbed by the movements of a few under-sized Indians loafing about the canoes at the landing. But the moment he heard the sound of the securing of the store door against the predatory instincts of Kate's customers he became alert.

He smiled to himself. Vannie, he felt, was an unusually fortunate man. Kate's care and capacity in running their store single-handed in her man's absence was a source of great admiration to him. With his understanding of the devastating solitude of the northern Barrens he felt it to be all rather wonderful. A woman. And so very frequently alone.

He saw Kate appear from within the outer defences of her house, and noted the devious method of her approach. Out of the tail of his eye he glimpsed the round figure in its neat cloth skirt, and the snow white waist that gleamed in the evening sunlight. There was no doubt about her destination. For the moment she looked to be making the landing. But he knew she would presently, in her round-about fashion, arrive where he sat.

Half-way to the river she paused and deliberately turned in the direction where the river narrowed down, and swept out of view round a forest-clad bend. She shaded her round eyes with a hand that augmented the shade of her linen sunbonnet. And then, by the alert cant of her head, he knew she was listening.

He watched her without pretence, and found himself listening, too. But no sound came back to him but of the

soft murmur of flowing waters, and such sounds as came from the Indians at the landing.

He knocked out his pipe and replenished it. Then he stooped and picked up a coal of fire from the white ashes. When he sat up again he saw that Kate was definitely heading towards him.

"I guessed I heard the beat of Vannie's paddle," she explained, as she took up a position in front of him, with her rough hands supported on her buxom hips.

Her round eyes were struggling to find the smile they were obviously intended to wear. But the effort was without success.

Spence grinned encouragingly.

"You figure he should be getting back?" he asked.

Kate glanced back at the river bend, and her sunbonnet shook.

"You can't never tell with Vannie," she replied. "You see, Vannie 'ud sell ten years of his life for a beat after Caribou. An' if he gets a sight he don't ever let up." She sighed. "I'll be glad when he's along."

Spence nodded understandingly.

"It's lonesome here for a woman," he agreed sympathetically. "I'd say you'll be pretty glad when Vannie's bank roll leaves you able to quit and get where things make you feel good."

The man's smiling gaze was disarming. There was apparently nothing behind his words. But for all that Kate started. Those round eyes of hers fell into their unhappy knack of widening till the whites of her eyes stared. She recovered herself almost instantly, however.

"That'll be a mighty long while yet," she replied hurriedly. "A trader's bank roll don't ever seem to grow in these Barrens. It's like the trees, an' grass an' things. My, I'd give a deal to quit. But I don't ever see the chance." She sighed and shook her head. "No, sir. I'll be buried somewhere in these mud banks. And in a while the freshets'll sweep the name-board where it won't mean a thing. Why

for, I sometimes ask, are folk drove to scratch life for themselves where the A'mighty never intended life to be ? You boys come an' go, so to speak. But us ? No. We just set right here, an' eat three feeds in the day if we're lucky. An' when we done that, why, we just start in to do it over again —till we're dead."

Spence crossed his sturdy legs, and Kate moved to the upturned box in which the policeman usually stowed his camp utensils. She lowered herself carefully on to it. And it groaned under her weight.

" Yet the pelt trade should be swell," Spence argued gently. " Half the world are women. And every woman needs furs. Bucket was toting a swell bunch of foxes. He's been getting all the foxes he needs years. Why, he's got half our neches hunting for him."

He was watching the simple creature's expressive eyes. But they told him nothing just now.

" Bucket's got good trade, but we don't handle any of it," Kate retorted with some bitterness. " Bucket's got a clam licked, when he means to shut his face. He just gets around and hands you a sight of his pelts that makes you want to holler. An' then passes right on. Maybe in a while he'll buy a roll of tobacco, or a suit to keep that mean body of his warm in winter. But it's always dollars. He buys with dollars. Cold dollars. 'Tain't trade."

" No." Spence blew smoke. " You need it both ways, eh ? Profit on your pelts. Profit on the truck you pay with ? Bucket's a pretty slick hand. I wonder where he makes his trade ? "

Kate's dislike of Bucket was such that she was quite ready to talk.

" Where ? " she echoed. " That's the sort of thing me an' Vannie's askin' the whole time. 'Cept us ther' ain't trade on Moon River anywheres. I guess it's way south of the lake. When I hand it him he just gives me the cold look over an' says he needs to trade, not to hand presents. And if I know that fish-eyed dude he certainly don't."

"I s'pose he's making trade south now?" Spence said casually. Then he added: "Maybe one of these trips I'll make it with him."

"Why?"

Kate's question snapped. And the man pressed his tobacco down in his pipe with one strong, deliberate finger.

"Just curiosity," he said, with a shrug.

But Kate's sudden fear outran all caution, all discretion.

"That's p'lice way, I guess," she said roughly. "You need to know who a boy is. Why he is. An' all he does. Why are you waitin' around—now?"

"Looking to tote the police Doc. back to Green Lake—when he comes along."

The troubled woman gazed down the river. Her eyes rested unregistering on the figures loitering at the landing.

"Maybe it was him I thought I heard awhile back," Kate said presently. "I guessed it was Vannie. But if I'd heard Vannie on the river he'd ha' been along before now. Will he be along in a kettle like this boat o' yours?"

"Likely."

"You'd get the sound of an engine miles away on this river."

"I didn't hear it."

The sunbonnet wagged negatively.

"You wouldn't. You don't need to listen like a lone woman," Kate sighed. "Say—it's that sickness?"

"The 'fly.'"

Kate nodded.

"You don't need a Doc.," she declared, with scornful energy. "What we want in these Barrens is a poison spray. Something to kill the flies an' skitters. I tell you ther's a time comin' when human folk wont' be able to live around for them. It's a crool country! Vannie says it's hell. An' Vannie's mostly right."

"I'm certainly in agreement with Vannie," Spence laughed. "But this is a bad sickness. And it's not from the river or the lake. It comes from way back in Bucket's

territory. And the neches bring it. Those who hunt for him among those foxes."

"Mr Arden got it?" Kate challenged sharply. "He didn't work around for—Bucket."

Spence shook his head.

"But he went inside—in Bucket's territory. And he came back with it, and—died."

Kate was no longer gazing at the river. Her round eyes were staring at the policeman from under her sunbonnet in a look of horror.

"He came back with it from—Bucket's territory?" she cried.

Spence inclined his head, and blew more smoke. But he made no verbal reply.

"What you make of—that?" Kate asked presently, in an awed tone.

Spence bent down and lifted the lid off his camp kettle. The smell from it was appetizing.

"I guess it's the muskegs—maybe," he said quietly, and replaced the lid.

Kate sighed heavily.

"Yes!" she ejaculated. "That'll be where the flies ——"

She broke off.

"Say, can you hear?" she challenged, holding up a plump, warning finger. "That'll be a kettle—same as yours."

Spence sat up. The faint "chug" of a motor-boat somewhere beyond the bend of the river was unmistakable.

. . . . .

"Who's the war with on this creek of yours, Corporal?"

Jimmy Paton's twinkling eyes were gazing up from the stern of the boat which Spence had just made fast to the landing. The black-haired Sandy was busy with his engine, which had exploded its final cough, and now reposed a hot, oily, reeking machine amidships.

" War ? " Spence questioned.

Kate Smith at his elbow was breathing heavily. The loitering Indians were grouped about them.

Jimmy glanced quickly at the woman. He noted the widened eyes. Then he scanned the Indians. The twinkle vanished from his eyes. His broad shoulders shrugged.

" Oh, it doesn't matter," he said. " I just thought there was a war on." He stood up and stepped on to the landing. " My name's Paton. Doctor James Paton. I'm a ' med'cine man ' sent up by Inspector Ferrers. You, I guess, are Corporal Spence."

He took the hand that Spence held out, and gripped it.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE NORTHERN HIGHWAY

The police boats were lying drawn up on the bank. Sandy Alexander was at the water's edge engaged in a perfunctory cleaning. It was the food chattels which he scoured with the easy indifference of the half-breed. Along the river bank came the usual night chorus of frogs, and the drowsy murmur of restless waters. Then behind, higher up the bank, was the low monotony of white men's voices talking.

Corporal Spence and Jimmy Paton were facing each other across a fire that was no longer just a smoulder of ashes. It was a cheerful blaze that robbed the northern evening of its chill.

The interminable daylight was at length waning. The last meal of the day had been eaten. There was nothing now between the men and their blankets but the talk which must be made. Jimmy's big body was at ease upon the box that had protested under the bulk of Kate Smith. Spence was squatting, Indian fashion, with his hands clasped about his knees. Jimmy found the policeman a satisfying study. He liked the quiet manner, the air of undemonstrative resolution. To his mind the man's personality suggested all his superior had claimed for it.

On the other hand, Spence was no less interested in the man who had been sent in response to his call for help.

Jimmy had just completed the story of his ugly adventure on the river. Nor had the story lost any of its significance from the light, whimsical manner of its telling. Jimmy's method suited Spence's mood. It came as a pleasant relief

to his own anxious pondering. And it helped him to appreciate the fact that the troubles of Green Lake were no longer a burden for his shoulders alone.

Jimmy searched his pockets as his story came to an end.

"Of course," he said, "I'm just a civilian Doc., only temporarily attached to you folks. And there are those who reckon Docs. need killing anyway. Maybe they're right. Folks are welcome to their opinions. But my trouble is I've had a deal of training in the killing business. And if there's any going around I want to be in the doings. Some feller tried hard to kill me 'way back there. And I'm yearning to get after that pirate with the law backing me. And that before we set another mile between him and us."

He held out his open hand.

"Get a look at 'em," he said. "Spent shells. Mauser. Four of 'em loosed off at me. I took them where he'd steadied on a tree-trunk for—darn bad shooting."

Spence examined the shells. He read the name on the heads of them. Then he dropped them in a pocket. He nodded and removed his pipe.

"Sure. Mauser," he said quietly. "I'll keep 'em. There's been a deal of Mauser shooting on the river."

Spence's thoughtful gaze was levelled at the movements of the half-breed at the water's edge. Jimmy waited. He re-lit the pipe that had gone out while he had been talking, and dropped the firebrand back into the fire. Spence turned at last, and his steady eyes betrayed no emotion.

"I best hand it you now. Before we turn in," he said. "It's easy talking now. You see, to-morrow we'll need to drop back where that boy pulled on you. Maybe I can show you the way it all fits in. At least it seems that way to me."

He kicked the fire together, and hugged his knees again.

"You see, Doc., I'm figgering your work won't only be the sickness. I'm guessing the moment you touch that sickness you'll touch other things, too. You'll get right up against a lot. So sit an' smoke, and fire questions as I go along. I'm not good at a yarn. Your questions'll help." He

released a hand and thrust back his cap. "It'll be good to talk," he said wearily. "It's been on my mind months. It'll be good. Hellish good."

Spence's story carried them well on to midnight. Sandy had long since completed his cleaning and retired to his blankets. The last of the daylight had merged into the twilight of an aurora-lit night. They talked to the accompaniment of Nature sounds which grew in volume and variety as the night progressed.

The length of the policeman's story owed much to the keen questioning of the chemist's searching mind. He wanted it all, fact and conclusion, so that he should see it as the man who had sent for his help saw it.

But curiously enough it was not Spence's account of the 'fly' sickness and the outbreaks of dementia that claimed the doctor's deepest interest. Perhaps he considered a layman's observations to be, if not valueless, at least doubtful from a professional point of view. Doubtless personal diagnosis would tell him much better than Spence's descriptions. It was the general story of Green Lake that brought forth his most pertinent questions. They came like the quick-fire of a machine gun. And his persistence and alertness was an education to the man of slower mind.

When the last detail of Spence's story had been dissected, and the bone of it laid bare under the doctor's microscopic searching, Jimmy knocked out his pipe and regarded his victim with a twinkling humour.

"Patience!" he cried, with a gesture of amused wonder. "Boy, you're a whale! You said ask questions. But you didn't guess I'd treat you like an encyclopædia." He nodded. "But I've got it all. I know Green Lake now and its folk, Indian and white, the same as if I'd lived there a thousand years."

He pointed with the stem of his pipe.

"There's just one thing leaps out from all the rest," he went on with a smile. "It looks like there are two boys sitting over this fire who're going to get a busy time. And

by that I don't mean just work. You know I've always fancied mixing chemicals by way of pastime, and generally cooking up what Ferrers calls 'stinks' in a laboratory. Well, I haven't any more desire that way now till I've discovered the reason the folks in your territory are crazy to shoot around with—Mausers."

His grin passed, and he stared into the blaze of the fire.

"It looks to me when we get back of that," he went on, "we shan't need to guess hard locating why a perfectly healthy outfit of neches start in to collect an unsavoury disease that never had the decency to find its way to the pages of authoritative text-books on human ailments."

Spence stood up. He brushed the dust from the seat of his uniform breeches and stretched himself.

"Yes," he said. "It's a queer mix up. And your story looks like making it harder. I want to pull out after your man at daylight."

Jimmy nodded.

"I'd say it's about thirty miles."

"You could locate the spot?"

"Surely."

"Good."

Spence yawned.

"I'm mighty thankful for your coming, Doc.," he said, replenishing the fire. "I'll sleep easier."

Jimmy laughed.

"That's to the good, boy," he said. "Mr Ferrers reckons you've been doing a deal of overtime. And," he added kindly, "I think he's glad for having you here." Jimmy moved over to where his blankets were laid out. "Those footprints I found. Rubbers. They wouldn't be neche?"

"No. Not with a Mauser."

"I s'pose not."

Jimmy sat down on his sleeping bag, and pulled off his long boots. Then he slid himself under the fur, and in half a minute was sound asleep.

. . . . .

The police boat was on the river in the chill of the earliest dawn. Sandy Alexander was left behind. There was no need of him. Spence was at the engine and Jimmy drowsed at the tiller as the little craft swept down on a stream that brought them to their destination long before the full heat of the sun had warmed the fly legions into active hostility.

But the journey proved a keen disappointment. Jimmy's fighting spirit was bitterly active. The murderous attack on him was something unforgivable. So the vain search of the woods on the river bank went on until the fall of night, and was renewed again the following morning.

They searched the bank for several miles up and down the river. They penetrated deep amongst the twilit aisles of bald tree trunks. They left nothing within their reach unexplored. And the net result was little enough beyond the discoveries Jimmy had originally made.

The one illuminating item was the discovery of the ashes of a camp fire some half a mile inland from the river. And it was only illuminating in that it added further proof of human presence in the neighbourhood. It was in a small clearing. And the signs were of a simple night camp and nothing more. There was not a thing to afford any clue to the identity of the campers. Every track and trace beyond the ashes of the fire had been deliberately and obviously eliminated. There was not even the imprint of rubber shod feet such as had been seen and measured, and a pattern of them carefully taken, at the fallen tree-trunk on the river bank.

Spence accepted the result without apparent concern. And something of his calm helped the disappointment of his disgusted companion.

"You see, Doc.," he urged, as he prepared to start up his engine for the return journey, "the odds were dead against anything worth while. I allow there was a chance, a bare chance of a useful clue. But somehow I've got a feeling that the folk who use Mausers on this river aren't ordinary blundering pirates. Those rubber footprints don't interest

me a lot. That camp doesn't set me crazy, either. We've got the Mauser shells. And I guess that's the big thing. We wouldn't have got them only you set that boy on the run."

Jimmy took his place at the tiller. The engine spluttered. Then it roared itself warm under an open throttle. Then it steadied to an even purr, and the boat slid out from under the shelter of the high, moist bank. In a moment it was fighting the heavy head stream on its way back to Vannie's on Bluff Lake.

The homeward journey had none of the speed of the trip down. The thirty odd miles had to be fought for every yard of the way. For the most part it was a silent journey. Spence was silent because it was his way. And Jimmy was pondering the story he had listened to from his companion.

After some hours the forest was left behind, and the whole aspect of the river was transformed. In place of the lean, straight, leafless boles of primordial forest now the banks rose sheer, and rugged, and gorge-like on either hand. They mounted to a great height of bald grey granite almost at once. And then, as the miles slipped away behind them, slowly flattened out in a long, gradual descent, which terminated in a muskeg plain that stretched away as far as the eye could see.

Here the river widened out into a reed-grown marsh. Jimmy had quite got over the fears with which he had first approached this ugly stretch with Sandy Alexander. He felt he knew it by heart and drove for the big centre channel with perfect confidence. He understood the reason for that open channel, too. It was its immense depth which kept it clear of reeds. There were patches of submerged drift weed to foul the propeller, but they were not difficult to avoid. They only needed a sharp look-out.

It was in the midst of his preoccupation with this threat of weed that a sharp exclamation broke from the man at the engine.

Jimmy looked up. Spence's arm was flung out pointing. Then, without a word, it dropped to the engine which was

instantly shut off. The next moment the policeman picked up a paddle and the vessel swung about. He cautiously nosed it into a great clump of reeds.

. . . . .

The motor-boat was lying beside a long, narrow-built canoe that was on the lines of a kyak. It was made fast to it. And both vessels were held against the stream by the dense growth of reeds which closed about them. Jimmy Paton was forward of the engine. He was kneeling over the dead body of a man that was literally riddled with bullets. The body had been transferred from the kyak which Spence was busy searching.

The doctor's task was by no means easy in the confined space of the motor-boat. Already he had located about a dozen wounds all of which were in the body about the chest and bowels. And they told him not of simple murder, but of a fight, a fight to a finish with this dead thing playing a real man's part. And as Jimmy pondered, the ghastliness of it carried his mind back to the attack on himself.

The whole thing had been difficult and not a little dangerous amongst the crowding reeds. But with infinite skill Spence had contrived it. The derelict, with its burden of death, had been driven deep into the reeds, whether purposely or by the weight of stream it would have been impossible to say. But it had left an open passage behind it which had betrayed its presence, and made it possible for the police boat's approach.

Recognition of the dead man had been instant. It was Bucket, with wide, fish-like, staring eyes. The detrimental from beyond the Gateway. And it was this recognition which had prompted the search of the boat.

Had it been a stranger, anyone else, in fact, after ascertaining that the man was dead, Spence would have taken the canoe in tow without delay, and waited for easier conditions. As it was, his police instinct was too strong. Nothing but instant search would satisfy. Here, miles, many many miles

south of his own territory, Bucket had fought a fierce battle and accepted defeat. What was the meaning of it ?

Spence raised himself from his prone position in the well of the canoe. He knelt up. And Jimmy Paton waited.

The policeman was holding a hide sack of beaded Indian work. It was the tobacco sack he had sometimes seen in Bucket's possession. He had opened it, and was examining its contents. The sack was bulging. It was extraordinarily full, and Spence tilted it so that a light green powder poured out into the palm of his hand.

The doctor was watching him. Spence eyed the powder suspiciously. Then he raised his hand as though about to smell it.

" Not on your life ! "

The doctor almost shouted his warning. And it was just in the nick of time. Spence looked up curiously. His hand lowered on the instant, and he turned on the man in the other boat.

" Why ? "

" It's—alphaine ! "

The chemist held out a hand. " Let me look," he said. " I'd know it a mile off."

Spence returned the powder to the sack and passed it across. The doctor accepted it, and indicated the hand that had held the powder.

" Wash it off, man," he insisted. " Be rid of the last grain of the darn stuff as though you were scared for your life."

The policeman obeyed without question, but without haste. He, nevertheless, rinsed his hand in the water very thoroughly. Then he looked up.

" Alphaine ? " he questioned.

Jimmy Paton nodded.

" Sure," he said, his eyes alight with a cheerful twinkle. " I guess this is the biggest day's work you've done in your life, man. Spotting that dead junk's canoe looks like netting you fifty thousand dollars. That's the reward the government are offering to the boy who leads them to where this

dope comes from. Man, you've hit the trail just as sure as death. Now, I know your trouble on Green Lake."

Jimmy eyes were shining.

"Come on! We've got to tote this carrion with us. We may need it. I'm going to show you just how you can touch those fifty thousand dollars."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST OF BUCKET

When Kate saw the doctor and Corporal Spence returning to the landing with an apparently empty canoe in tow, an apprehensive gesture brought her rough, strong hands clasping to her ample bosom. Panic held her shaking. In the distance the boat looked like Vannie's. And it suddenly seemed to her as if the very bottom of her world had crashed through.

Her first sight of the boats was as they rounded the great bend of the river. And apprehension grew with each moment as she awaited the arrival. In her headlong way she jumped to her conclusion. The blow she had foreseen, and so long awaited, had fallen. There could be only one meaning to that empty, towed boat. Disaster. Vannie's empty boat could only mean that Vannie was—dead.

The boats slid up to the landing and her fearful eyes goggled at the tow. She failed to reply to Spence's greeting. Her whole being was concentrated on the blanket-wrapped figure lying in the bottom of the second boat. Then quite suddenly a wave of relief swept over her. She had recognized the boat. It was Bucket's.

Spence and the doctor leapt ashore. Neither spoke. They turned at once to their tasks. Spence made the police-boat fast while the other hauled in the tow line.

"Is it—Bucket?"

Kate's question was an awed whisper. She was still clasping her bosom. Spence spoke without looking up from the ring to which he was mooring the boat.

"Yes," he said. "Dead! Shot to pieces. Some one's done the job and—made sure."

The women remained silent. Fresh panic was rising. Her lips were moving as though muttering to herself.

"Who—done it?" she asked.

The question was literally jerked out of her at last. It was almost a gasp.

Spence stood up. He was about to move to Jimmy Paton's assistance.

"Can't say," he replied. He gazed into the panic-stricken face, and understood. "We located him dead in his boat. It was hidden in the big reed swamp. It's murder. The Doc.'s going to look into things."

Kate was making a supreme effort. And again Spence understood. He felt pity for her. He knew just what was troubling her. But he was wholly unprepared for the question with which she betrayed herself.

"Will he locate the gun that—did him?"

Spence nodded and passed on to help with the body.

Kate backed from the landing as though fearful of that dead thing that was being brought ashore. It was wrapped about with one of Bucket's old blue blankets. But never for a moment did her horrified gaze wander from the ghastly burden.

Spence spoke as they carried it abreast of her.

"Where can we lay him out?" he asked.

And without a word Kate led the way to the store.

. . . . .

Spence was standing in the open gateway in the defences about Vannie's store. Kate was with him. They had left Jimmy Paton to his unpleasant task within one of the empty storehouses.

"What makes you think Vannie did it?" Spence asked without any softening. His manner was calculated.

There was no sympathy now in the eyes that read through the pitiful terror the woman was trying to conceal. But if

Spence displayed no sympathy he nevertheless understood. Kate was just a good, kindly, devoted wife who worshipped the man of her choice while she knew all his faults.

In truth, at that moment Kate saw Vannie handcuffed and on his way south where the rope was waiting to strangle out of him the life that meant the whole of everything to her. She felt she knew only too well what had happened. Vannie was returning with a great roll of money. He must have encountered Bucket. She knew her man's greed. It was the thing she had always dreaded. A sudden impulse. Why not keep it all ? That was it. She knew. And even in her fear her pride in her man made her ask herself an instant question. What chance had a gink like Bucket if Vannie meant to kill him ?

Spence's rough challenge drove her to defence.

" I don't," she snapped. Then in flat contradiction : " only Vannie's on the river. An' Vannie ain't ever had use for Bucket."

" But he wouldn't kill without good reason ? "

Kate's eyes lit with eager hope. But the hope died almost instantly.

" I can't see why Vannie 'ud want to kill him," she lied, with a little despairing gesture. " Ther' ain't no sense to it. None. No. I tell you my Vannie didn't kill him. I know Vannie. He never killed that skunk."

" Nevertheless you're scared he did. Why ? "

Spence was driving her as he intended. He saw the leap of anger in the big round eyes. And somehow he thought of the angry mother in defence of her offspring.

" I tell you he never did ! You ! " She burst out fiercely. " Is that your dirty p'lice way to make a helpless old woman give her man away ? You ! You ! I tell you Vannie didn't have reason in the world to kill that gink. He hadn't use for him. But that ain't no reason. An' you can't twist it into one. You hadn't use for Bucket. Would you have killed him ? Get sense. Anyway, when the Doc.'s through maybe we'll get wise. Vannie don't pull anything but a

Winchester, and his bullets for Caribou is all split to make 'em sure. Maybe—Ah, here's the Doc. P'raps he's through."

Spence turned away and went to meet Jimmy hurrying from the improvised mortuary.

"Well?"

But he needed no verbal answer. The answer was in the doctor's thoughtful eyes as he gazed at the two bullets lying in his open palm.

"The same weapon," he said at once. "Mauser."

Spence took the bullets and examined them closely. Then he nodded, and returned them to the hand waiting to receive them. Then he turned to discover Kate's radiant face beside him.

"Your Vannie's all right," he said easily. "I'm glad he only pulls a Winchester, even if he does split his bullets. Do you feel like telling me of Bucket?"

But Kate was mistress of herself again. Relieved of her dread her mind worked swiftly. And of a sudden she realized something that thrilled her. Vannie was to return and pay over a huge sum of dollars to Bucket. And Bucket was dead. What then? There would be no one to——

"Ther' ain't nuthin' to tell," she snapped in reply. "You must 'a' know'd Bucket better'n Vannie nor me. Bucket wasn't a thing in our lives 'cep' he didn't make trade with us. I guess the good Lord's liable to be more merciful to him than I'd ever 'a' been. An' I'll be thankful for you to dump him out o' sight in a grave so Vannie won't have to clean up junk he never had use for."

. . . . .

Jimmy was stretched out on his blankets. His keen eyes were observing the massed attack of the swarming mosquitoes endeavouring to penetrate the pall of camp fire smoke drifting in a protective, moving canopy over where he lay. He was smoking and pondering deeply.

Spence had just dumped the supper pots and pannikins into a bucket of water for a preliminary soak before Sandy

Alexander scoured them. He came and took up his position by the fire, squatting in the smoke stream.

"We'll need to bury it at daylight," he said, jerking his head in the direction of the store, while he prepared his pipe. "It's a poor sort of job."

"Yes." Jimmy's eyes flashed a grin at the man whom he found to be more than companionable. "He's collected sixteen wounds and I'm trying to figure how. Think of it. Sixteen. And it was only one that killed him. Seems like the same hand that pulled on me."

"Or a long range battle."

"Ye-es. I guess that's the answer. And yet we never found a weapon in his canoe."

"That's easy. The murderer cleaned up his outfit. There was only that blanket he was lying atop of, and just his belongings in his pockets."

Spence lit his pipe and his gaze was on the river where the big bend swung away eastward.

"About that—alphaine? Would you say that boy was using that dope himself—or——"

Jimmy's head wagged in a decided negative.

"I don't think he was any doper," he said. "Of course, you never can tell with these foul snuffs. That's the way the stuff's generally used. Although, of course, it can be used in solution as an injection, or by the mouth. The thing I seem to see is this Bucket man was a trader in it. That stuff in his tobacco sack was likely his own private trade, stolen from a cargo he was toting down for sale. How does this seem to fit? This stuff fetches fabulous sums. It's a big trade, and there's no doubt all sorts of crooks trying to jump in. You can't get away with a secret traffic all the time and no one get wise. Maybe he was the agent working with those who make it. I'd gamble on that. Maybe his boat was shipping a big cargo. Maybe the hold-up was waiting on him. Well, after they'd got him out of the way——"

"They'd strip the boat of everything. Sure."

Spence smoked thoughtfully.

"That starts another thought," he went on a moment later.

"Would you reckon your hold-up was by the same bunch?"

"Likely. One of them."

"One. Yes. Do you figure Bucket was up against more than one?"

Jimmy pondered.

"I think so," he said at last. "It's difficult. But some shots took him from behind. Others were in front. Well, anyway we'll need to bury him and get on to Green Lake on the rush. That's the place that's calling us. And it's calling pretty loud."

Spence released his arms from about his knees and pressed the tobacco down in his pipe.

"Yes," he agreed. "We must beat it to-morrow. I'm not sorry to be without Bucket on the river. This looks like bringing those behind him out into the open. That's a cinch if your notion he's their principal agent is right."

"And if that happens——?"

Jimmy made an expressive gesture. And Spence nodded.

"Yes. All that—and then some more," he said. "I sort of feel that that fifty thousand dollars reward is a bit of dreaming that'll take a lot of turning into—Hello!"

Spence broke off, peering out down the river, where the wooded bend swallowed it up. A big canoe, whose make and shape were instantly recognizable to the policeman even at a distance, had just come round the bend.

"Looks like a Mission outfit," Spence muttered, after awhile.

Jimmy grinned.

"And the pace they're driving makes me think they're feeling good at the sight of Vannie Smith's landing."

. . . . .

The canoe was fast at the landing. A big half-breed, who mainly favoured his Indian forebears, was unshipping the

outfit. The doctor was watching the curious slouch of his gait with smiling interest. His every movement was unhurried. But the work was done swiftly enough. Jimmy understood. Here was an example of that skill and experience wherein a maximum of result was produced with the least possible labour. Doubtless this big creature's whole life was bounded by the making and striking of his daily camps.

He turned to Spence who was greeting the half-breed's white companion. The man's clothing was unmistakable. It was the semi-clerical uniform of the missionary. His eager face was bronzed with exposure, and a stubbly growth of chin whisker and moustache told of the ease with which a man yields up the customs of civilization when its boundaries are left behind. The newcomer's voice matched the eagerness of his face. And his gladness at the meeting was patent.

"I didn't hope to find you till I made Green Lake, Corporal," he said. "I can't say how glad I am. I'm Alof Lenoir from the Keewin Mission College. Josiah Varser, our beloved principal, has sent me up in answer to your communication to endeavour to replace poor Mervyn Arden. I have a letter for you from Mr Varser."

The missionary plunged a hand searching in an inner pocket and finally produced a large square envelope, that was somewhat crumpled, from amongst a number of other papers. He passed it to the policeman who took it and tore it open. It took a few minutes to read the contents. Then he looked up and held out a cordial hand.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr Lenoir," he said heartily. "And I can't just tell you how glad I am you've come along at this particular time."

He glanced at Jimmy, standing beside him on the river bank, and jerked his head in the doctor's direction.

"This is Doctor James Paton," he said. "He's come along from Lake Athaba to help me with the sickness on Green Lake. And he and I have just been figuring how we were to make out reading a burial service over a white man who's been murdered on this river."

CHAPTER XVIII

VANNIE SEES GHOSTS

For once in her life Kate had endured a sleepless night. It had been a day of unpleasant shocks. And her simple mentality was incapable of withstanding their reactions. So the morning found her with eyes that ached, and a mental condition that was almost chaotic.

Her greatest trouble was that she found herself assailed by a torrent of questions to which she could provide no satisfying answers. What was happening on the river? Where was Vannie all this time? What could he be doing? Would he be hunting caribou? And Corporal Spence, and the stranger doctor? What were they thinking? What did they know? And, anyway, for gracious sakes, where were she and Vannie drifting?

Bucket murdered! There was no doubt of that. By whom? Why? But Vannie had not done it? Spence and the doctor were satisfied on that. But since Vannie had had nothing to do with his death, just what did it signify to herself and her man? One thing, at all events, stood out amidst all her apprehensions, all her questionings. Vannie would or should come back home with a vast roll of money. And there would be no one to receive the bulk of it.

Bucket was dead!

Bucket was the man to whom Vannie must pay over the money. He was also the man from whom they were to receive. In this trade which she hated and feared, she and Vannie knew no one else. Then what must happen? She knew her man well enough to understand that he would pay

over to no one else, since—Bucket was dead. Kate thrilled in spite of her fears. She even dared to consider the whole thing from another angle. Had their great moment of fortune come? It looked like it. Would Vannie decide to clear out with this last windfall? He might. Yes. She thought he would.

But would it be so easy as all that? And as she asked herself the question her simple soul was set violently quaking. No. It could not be. Good fortune had never been easy in her life.

Then Spence, with his quiet, quick manner of seeing things. And that doctor, whose eyes twinkled so you never knew quite what he was thinking. When she considered these two she knew she feared them far more than the folk, the organization which she knew operated somewhere in the background behind Bucket.

The morning light brought her no real comfort. In her simple faith she longed for the big presence of Vannie to comfort and hearten her. But, alas, Vannie was not there. And she had not a ghost of an idea when he would return to her.

Sunrise saw the burial of Bucket. It was Spence and Jimmy Paton who decided the place for the grave, and the missionary, Lenoir, who administered the service. Lenoir's half-breed, Louis Batteau, and Sandy Alexander, dug the grave in the shadow of the dark forest, behind the log defences of the trader's store. And after the ceremony they set up a stout rail fence of sapling spruce about it. Whatever sort of man Bucket had been in life, in death he was at least entitled to safety from the attentions of the scavenging-forest creatures.

Kate attended the funeral. It was an irresistible attraction to her woman's mind. It even stirred her emotions. As the earnest missionary read the simple service for the burial of the dead, and dropped a handful of soil upon the body in the deep grave, she found herself almost tearfully disposed for the man whom, in life, she had so cordially disliked.

Then had followed the general exodus for Green Lake. All the men had set out together, the missionary gladly enough putting himself in the hands of the policeman for guidance. And Kate had watched them go with a deep sense of relief.

She speeded them cheerfully. And her farewell was profoundly genuine. She was standing at the landing. And as she watched the two police boats, and the missionary's stout canoe, with its two occupants, pass out of sight on the broad, wind-ruffled bosom of the lake, every apprehension of her long wakeful night returned to her with re-doubled force.

Then, several hours later, came Vannie.

. . . . .

Vannie and Kate were together beside the newly constructed enclosure set up about Bucket's grave. Vannie's great body was leaning on its top rail, and his small black eyes were hot with the thought behind them. The woman was watching him. She was waiting expectantly. And all her fears were uppermost.

Kate had told her man of the happenings since his going. She had left no detail out of her story. And then she had added to it all the doubts and fears which beset her, and urged him to the thing which those fears prompted. Now, she was awaiting the verdict which, she understood, he alone must pronounce. In the end it was always Vannie's will that prevailed between them. So it had always been in their life together.

At last Vannie drew a deep breath and turned to her.

His black eyes had narrowed. And the unloveliness of his face was intensified. One great hand was raised to his hay-like hair, and he thrust back his cloth cap and raked his fingers through it.

"It's the finish of our trade, anyway, old girl," he said. "That's dead gut. And a swell finish, too," he added gleefully.

Kate inclined her head. But her round eyes snapped, and her tone was acid.

"You don't need to hand me that," she said sharply. "Bucket's dead, ain't he? Now what?"

Vannie's hand left his hair and groped to an inner pocket of his rough coat. Kate saw the movement, and understood. She waited a little breathlessly. But the hand was withdrawn empty. And Vannie grinned as it sought his tobacco plug, and his strong teeth bit off a chew.

"Guess ther' ain't no 'what'—yet," he said thoughtfully.

"You mean we ain't—quittin'?"

The woman's eyes had widened till the pupils were ringed with white.

"No. We're stoppin' around."

Vannie turned about and leant his broad back against the fence. He was gazing out afar while he masticated. And somehow he gave the impression of a man gazing upon something that only he could see. Something disturbing, something unpleasant. Something that stirred him to revolting. Kate realized his preoccupation. She even realized something of that which his stare betrayed.

"What is it, Vannie?" she asked sharply. "What's it you ken see? You might be lookin' at—ghosts."

Vannie came out of his preoccupation with a curious grin.

"Maybe I am," he said, in a tone. And Kate was even more disturbed.

"Spence was set on you havin' done Bucket up," she warned anxiously. "That is, till he see them Mauser bullets. Why'd he guess you'd pull on Bucket? You didn't?"

The man shook his head which was sizes too small for his body.

"No, old girl. You ken rest easy. I ain't see Bucket since I quit right here. No. It's jest natural. I was the only feller Spence knew was on the river."

Kate was more than disappointed.

"He thought that, cos he knew you was on the river?" Kate scorned. "You guess again, old man. Spence ain't

the boy to think you'd shot up Bucket just because you wer' on the river. That red-coat's got a hunch to our trade. You can gamble on it. If I'm a judge we best get out while the going's good. Ther' ain't a soul fer you to hand that roll of money to now. You ain't figgerin' to hand it—some one else ? "

" Not to a livin' soul ! " Vannie's eyes gleamed. Then he laughed shortly. " Nor a dead one either." His great fist struck his breast where his coat-pocket bulged, and a dull flush stained his hard, weathered face. " It's ther', Kate, my gal ! An' ther' it stops ! It's a pile ! A hell of a pile ! How much ? Gee ! If I said you'd throw a fit. It's ours. Yours an' mine. An' I'll fight the whole o' the p'lice force but I'll keep it. See ? But Spence hasn't a thing on me. No."

" But the folks behind—Bucket ? "

Kate laid a shaking hand on the man's arm. He shook it off roughly. And again he was staring out at those things that only he could see.

" Spence is wantin' those folk," he said at last. " Spence is around all the time. He knows things. How much you can't ever tell. And now ther's this new guy come along. No. Those folks'll lie low. It looks that way to me. Yes. We'll stop around ready to beat it on the jump. An' if we need to beat it they'll be yours, old gal. Them ' sun places.' Just all you need."

But Kate refused the intended comfort.

" But someone on the river did Bucket up," she persisted. " Shot him in sixteen places. Mauser. Who ? "

Vannie stood up from the rail. There was no grin on his hard face. His narrowed eyes had a look that Kate tried to read but failed. He seemed to be again gazing on those ghosts which haunted him. He shook his head sombrely.

" Ther's queer things doin' on the river, Kate," he said. " And they're things I ain't got all the rights of." His big body seemed to shiver, and Kate's fears deepened. " But I'll get it in a while. Sure. That's why we'll stop around.

Fergit it. Cut your worry out, an' leave it to me. It don't matter to us what Spence has got back of his mind about our trade. It won't hurt us. In a while he's going to need me. He's going to need my help. An' I'll pass it to him. We got all our stuff. Ther' ain't no more comin' through—Bucket. No. When Spence needs me I want to be around. An' it's a good bet something'll come out of it our way. Bucket killed—murdered. Well, I'm feelin' good fer that grave right here. An' I'm feelin' good you saw Bucket put wher' he'll stay put."

He turned. And his small eyes were gazing down upon the heaped soil.

"He can't get out from under that, I guess," he grinned. 'An' I'm glad."

CHAPTER XIX

JIMMY'S RADIANT VISION

The three men had just emerged from the last Indian lodge where sickness had set its seal of misery and gloom upon its occupants. A small brown figure had followed them out and remained in the opening. Its dusky hands were clutching at the loose curtains of the door, flung back to admit the mocking sunlight which had no power to cheer.

It was a small woman. And her two tiny children were clinging to the mannish garments which encased stout legs beneath the coloured blanket covering her diminutive body. Her big black eyes were fixed in a gaze of absorbed questioning intensity upon the purposeful face of Jimmy Paton.

But Jimmy was avoiding that gaze. With the aid of Spence's knowledge of the Caribou-eater's tongue he had already told her the result of his examination of her man, who was sick to death. And he had no desire to witness the voiceless tragedy that looked out of eyes that had so much in common with those of some gentle, stricken animal.

The hot noon air was literally alive with swarming insects. It was unusually breathless, too. For a moment it seemed as though even the restless spirits, who everlastingly seemed to haunt the desolate Barrens, had ceased to breathe. It was still. So still.

It was the day following the police party's arrival at Green Lake from Vannie's post. And Jimmy Paton had lost no time in setting about his work. He, and the new missionary under the guidance of Corporal Spence, had spent a long morning in the Indian settlement. They had visited every

teepee, and even penetrated old O-Kuk's more pretentious habitation. And everywhere the position had been carefully explained to the suspicious, brown-skinned creatures, who, while they received the white man, who could never hope to replace Mervyn Arden in their wayward affections, with some reservation, gladly welcomed the white "med'cine-man," who, they were told, was going to drive out the evil spirits besetting them so sorely.

To the new missionary the whole of that morning's work appeared to have been a little overwhelming. He had gone from lodge to lodge with the others, keen of eye, studying but somewhat silent. Perhaps it was his lack of the Caribou-eater's tongue. Perhaps it was the ghastliness of the disease which was so hideously rampant. Perhaps it was the earnestness with which he was approaching the almost hopeless task of following in the footsteps of his selfless predecessor.

For the most part he was almost self-effacing. But he listened to Jimmy's observations, helped to carry out his decisively given orders, and eagerly demonstrated his own urgent usefulness with a readiness that won both the doctor's and the policeman's warmest approval.

Alof Lenoir, in their view, would prove a welcome addition to the little white community at this far-flung outpost.

Spence was indefatigable, too. Policeman as he was, the tragedy overshadowing his post had driven its way to his very core. He, no less than the small brown woman in the lodge doorway, was looking to the twinkling-eyed Jimmy with a stirring of hope.

He knew how little of hope there really was. But, nevertheless, the humanity in him was very real. And for all the ugliness he had already discovered he could not resist the subtle up-lift which those amongst the medical fraternity who are truly skilled never fail to inspire. Whatever lay back of the appalling sickness he felt that the sufferers would surely be benefited by the presence in their midst of the cheerful Jimmy Paton.

The three men had finished their work now until after the

mid-day meal. Then it would be resumed and continued right on till the late evening. So there was nothing to do but to return to their several quarters and eat. Alof Lenoir belonged, of course, to the Mission, where his half-breed, Louis Batteau, was already transforming a derelict habitation into a home. Jimmy Paton had taken up his quarters in Spence's police shack.

In spite of his avoidance of the squaw's tragic gaze Jimmy could not resist her appeal. His eyes smiled down into the not unlovely face. He reached out a strong, lean hand and laid it upon her blanket-clad shoulder. Then he spoke to her through the policeman.

"I wish I could say your man would get well," he said. "He's very sick. The Bad Spirit's got his whole body. But soon there'll be no Bad Spirit to get into anyone's body."

Spence conveyed the message, and interpreted the reply which came at once with an eagerness that troubled Jimmy sorely.

"The white man make med'cine? Then the Bad Spirit fly away from my man?"

Jimmy found it impossible to lie in face of the woman's blind trust. He was deeply moved. So he turned quickly and moved away.

The three white men hurried down to the lake. And as they went they discussed the morning's labours, and the labours still awaiting them. Jimmy gave no hint of the result of his observations. And Spence asked no questions. There was no need for him to do so—yet.

Alof Lenoir, on the other hand, now that the oppressing work lay behind them, displayed something of the appeal which the whole thing had made to him. He talked eagerly, urgently. And pity seemed uppermost in him. His sturdy arms gesticulated. His eyes shone. And his face, which was deeply weather-stained as a result of the long exposure of his journey from Keewin, told his listeners how deeply his Christian soul was affected.

"It's all too ghastly," he cried, after voicing a number of

questions to which Jimmy Paton found difficulty in replying without telling more than he desired. "I've never seen smallpox. But that's what I should have thought it was. Or—or—some sort of bubonic plague. It's the most loathsome thing. It's almost beyond imagination. Is there no hope, Doctor? None at all for any of those cases? Won't they recover?"

The man's eyes were hot with feeling. Jimmy shook his head.

"None," he said. "No hope for any of them. Every one of those who're attacked will die. It's a scourge more malignant than anything I know of in the world."

"Then what actually is it? I mean its name? The disease? You know it? It must have a real name. Not —'fly-sickness.'"

But again Jimmy shook his head.

They had passed from the settlement and were now moving down the slope to the water's edge. The Mission lay away to the left of them, and the smoke of Louis Batteau's fire was rising from it. To the right of them lay the grey bulk of the old Fort. And nearby, below it, the landing.

It was the latter which saved Jimmy a reply. A canoe had just run in alongside it. And, even as he gazed, June Kenyon leapt ashore. She had removed the fur cap from her head. And Jimmy was staring in wonder at the radiant colour which the baring of her head had exposed.

Just for an instant he paused. And those with him paused in sympathy. Then they were all moving on again, and Jimmy nodded.

"Of course," he said. "That's June Kenyon—and her uncle. I'd forgotten."

. . . . .

It was one of those inconsiderable moments in life, which, all unsuspected are to become landmarks. That wholly unexpected encounter with June Kenyon and her uncle at the landing was to become an important milestone in the life

of Jimmy Paton. It was the first time a beautiful woman had really become an object of deep interest in his life.

From his earliest days Jimmy Paton had been absorbed in the fascinating work of the laboratory. The matter of sex had been a vague loom held in complete subjection by the greater passion with which he pursued his mental labours. In fact, there looked to have been a serious danger of its complete submerging, so ardent was the man's desire for knowledge. In those years, when all the youthful fires should have been consuming, he had simply drifted farther and farther from the common inclination designed to complete man's life.

Here, in the stark desolation of the Barren Lands, the vision of June Kenyon came as a glorious revelation, which stirred his pulses and set them a-race. He had known her through the words of Corporal Spence. But the actual sight of the girl's tall, slim body, clad in its tunic jumper and well-cut breeches, her radiant aura of flaming hair, and her big blue eyes, that could darken so alluringly, completely translated a cold, mental picture into something vitally intriguing.

When the introductions at the landing had been duly completed, and June found herself smiling her greeting into a pair of shrewd, twinkling eyes, she, too, realized a personality that was wholly unexpected. A police doctor; an elderly, perhaps grey man, she had visualized. But this keen-faced, big-bodied, big-muscled youth came as a surprise that was not wholly without some feeling of doubt.

The girl's hand was held for a moment in a muscular grip. Then she realized the swift appraisement in the man's grey eyes as he turned to exchange greeting with her uncle. Somehow her glad smile died out at sight of it.

Her first words, however, were an expression of her deeper anxiety.

"Thank God you've come to help, Dr Paton," she said, with an earnestness there could be no misjudging. "This —this scourge? You've seen it already? You can do something? You can save these poor souls?"

Jimmy's smile remained, but June was conscious of a change in its quality. It suddenly became something hard and glittering.

"It's all a good deal worse than Spence's report made it seem to us," he said quietly.

There was an ominous shake of the head. Then Jimmy looked into the unsmiling face of the missionary who was regarding him as though to probe the last thought that lay behind his words.

"The big trouble," he explained, "is that it's some disease they don't know a thing about in the hospitals. I needn't say it's desperately bad. It's—it's almost like a virulent bubonic fever, except that there seems neither contagion nor infection. There are aspects that hint at some ghastly form of smallpox, too." He shook his head gravely. "But it's neither the one nor the other. No. If this were the tropics," he went on, as though debating with himself, "we might look for such a hideous reaction from the humid reek of swamp jungle. But here—here where the purest air currents stream down from the Pole, that's quite unthinkable. No northern muskeg could breed this horror. Besides, these Indians are a clean, sturdy race, which would not easily yield to that type of attack." He sighed. "There's no hope for those already down with it, though. Our only hope lies in prevention."

"Prevention? But how—if you don't know?" June's keen mind reacted instantly. The blue of her eyes deepened as they took in each of the three men in turn.

"Have you any hope of prevention?" Andrew Kenyon asked keenly.

"I think so."

Jimmy's illuminating twinkle had returned. His announcement was a little startling to everyone except the policeman.

"It's an ill wind, you know," Jimmy went on smiling. "I gather this scourge was quite unknown on Green Lake until the Indians worked for the man you call Bucket. Well, they'll never work for Bucket, again."

"Can you be sure of that?" Kenyon's question came with the doubt of past experience.

"Thank God if it's so," June exclaimed fervently. "But how do you know?" She turned to the policeman. "Are you going to forbid——?"

"Bucket's dead," Spence announced simply. Then he added: "He's been murdered. It's the same again. Mauser. Shot to pieces. Mr Lenoir buried him for us down at Vannie's.

"Dead!"

"Murdered!"

The exclamations broke simultaneously from uncle and niece. Then fell a moment of amazed silence, while Spence turned away to gaze out over the lake.

June stared at him, while her uncle's jaws shut tight. Finally, it was the missionary who spoke with a note of grievance.

"Yes, yes, of course, Bucket's dead. As Corporal Spence says, I officiated at the burial. But this other. I've been told nothing of it. Why? Am I not entitled to know all that affects my poor people? I don't understand the connection. Won't someone explain?"

He looked from one to the other. But as the explanation did not appear to be forthcoming he went on with some warmth.

"There seems so much mystery," he complained. "What is it? This Bucket? If he's the cause of my people's trouble, then may God forgive me if I say that I'm glad he is dead. Any creature who brings misery and unhappiness into the lives of helpless savages is surely better dead."

The downrightness of Alof Lenoir made a great appeal to June. She warmed to the sturdy creature who had the courage of his opinion. Quite suddenly it was borne in upon her that this man would fight for his benighted people just as determinedly as the gentle Mervyn Arden, but in a wholly different, more forceful way.

"I don't think God will hesitate to forgive that sentiment."

She smiled impulsively. "Yours is the courage to say what we all feel, Mr Lenoir. This prevention may be possible, if —if the thing hasn't gone too far."

"How 'too far'?"

Jimmy was swift to take the girl up. And June found herself regretting her impulse.

"Oh. I don't know," she said lamely. "But—but wasn't it the Indians themselves who refused to quit going to Bucket's hunting grounds."

"But Bucket is now no longer there to pay them with his trade," argued Spence without turning. "You forget that, Miss June."

"Don't worry, Spence," Andrew Kenyon retorted coolly. "Juny don't forget that. Was Bucket shot up at Vannie's?"

The question brought Spence round. His gaze was levelled at the engineer's strong face.

"No," he said. "Away below. We found him dead in his kyak. It was hidden up in the big reed swamp."

"Is that important?" Lenoir asked, a little impatiently. Then he gestured in the direction of the settlement. "No. It is the spectre of disease that haunts Bucket's hunting grounds. That's so, Dr Paton, isn't it? Those hunting grounds will make it possible to—help my poor people?"

The man's driving eagerness again claimed June's approval. But Jimmy became cautious.

"They certainly are most important," he said. "Those hunting grounds should tell us a lot. But it's not going to be easy, Mr Lenoir. It's often possible to locate the source of disease. And if it's one we know maybe we can cope with it. I can see months of hard work ahead, if, as Miss Kenyon says, these Indians refuse to give up visiting these places. And anyway the best hope from them is no better than the cause of the disease."

"I understand that. That's obvious, Doctor," the missionary replied. "But we must surely go and see, and learn for ourselves. Where are these hunting grounds? You know?"

Lenoir looked to the policeman for his answer. But it was Andrew Kenyon who supplied it.

"We've yet to locate 'em," he observed drily.

The missionary's disappointment was acute.

"You see, Bucket was a deal more than slick," Kenyon said. "He was as tight shut as a clam. You got to remember he was a pelt hunter. And those boys aren't ever yearning to advertise their hunting grounds. They're scared to death of folks jumping in on 'em. Still, we can locate 'em. We must. His home shack should hand us a line."

The missionary's eagerness quickened.

"And that's around here?" he asked. Then he appealed to all with a gesture. "Oh, we mustn't delay," he cried. "Think of my poor sick people. Think of all the horror we've already witnessed back there in those wretched lodges. We're white folks. We have science. We have everything to help. And they—they haven't a thing. Not even hope. They're just helpless, foolish savages who act on the impulses they haven't yet learned to control. Where, where is this man's place? Let's go to it without delay."

Spence pointed out across the lake.

"It's away north," he said. "Out there. Sixty miles or so beyond that Gateway."

Every eye was gazing out at the vast stretch of granite barrier which swept across the horizon from east to west. The jaws of the Gateway were gaping wide. They stood out without haze, clean-cut and monstrous, basking in a swelter of noon sunshine.

"Through that—opening?" Alof Lenoir's tone was a little awed. "What is it?"

June came to his help. She left her uncle's side and moved up the bank towards the man whose simple directness and courage had so pleased her. She pointed out over the water. And one hand was laid on the sleeve of the semi-clerical coat.

"Yes. Through there," she said, and she felt the muscles of the man's arm under the coat sleeve suddenly harden like steel. "It's a river. A great, wide, meandering river, that flows

on to the Pole. It's swamp that's scored with unexplored channels. But the main stream is full and strong. It flows through Bucket's hill country, and through the great plains of the sub-arctic. His hut's on the left bank, sixty odd miles along its course. He lived there alone. Quite alone. A disreputable, outcast trapper, as though in hiding from the world of civilization to which he rightly belonged."

Jimmy's eyes were pleasantly twinkling.

"That's a swell picture Miss June's painted for you, Padre," he said banteringly. "Does it urge?"

The missionary was quite undisturbed.

"Why, certainly, Doctor," he replied. "And I'm asking Corporal Spence here and now to let me accompany you on your investigations. Who knows? My untrained eyes may discover something helpful which the trained man may miss. You see, I just want to help all that one man may."

"And you shall," Jimmy replied cordially. "But now we'll need to get along and eat."

His smiling gaze sought the radiant face of the girl who was still at the missionary's side.

"There's so much to do, Miss June. There's so much to learn. Do you think we may come along and see you when Spence and I are through this evening? You see, a man of my profession is very dependent on evidence. I'm sure you two can help—if you will."

June smiled up into the pleasant grey eyes.

"Come by all means," she said warmly. "Uncle Andy and I will give you all the help in our power. We——"

A sudden wail broke in the heart of the settlement. It rose to a wild shrill of unmistakable terror. It died away. Then it came again louder than ever. And it was answered from a dozen different directions.

All the glad light died in June's pretty eyes.

"That's——!"

But she got no further. Spence had set off on the run for the settlement. And her uncle and the missionary and Jimmy were hard on his heels.

CHAPTER XX

JIMMY'S STORY

THERE were pleasant evening sounds drifting inshore from the lake. Soft, peaceful sounds that had no apparent relation to anything but the approach of the cool northern night. The sky was without a cloud, except where a great bank of summer mist was creeping up from the horizon to escort the setting sun upon its night journey. Jimmy Paton and the policeman were glad of the evening hush and the general sense of restfulness. A long and harassing day's work, which included for Jimmy his first contact with an appalling outbreak of the dreaded homicidal frenzy and death, left them both more than welcoming the day's close.

Somewhere at the back of the police shack, Sandy Alexander was foregathering with the river-men, Suliman and Ambuk. They were passing the hours before they slept striving with half-breed zest to relieve each other of any small change left over from the last pay-day. Poker claimed every spare moment of their leisure, and they played the game with reprehensible skill and cunning manipulation.

Spence was squatting on an up-turned bucket outside the door of his quarters. Jimmy Paton was occupying the greater comfort of the slab-stone door sill. The remains of the evening meal had been carried out of sight by the poker players. But the fire was left smouldering.

Spence was gazing out across the lake where the evening mists had reduced the Barrier to an undefined smudge upon the skyline. Jimmy, to the exclusion of everything else, was absorbed in the grey outline of the old Fort. And for a long time there had been no spoken word between them.

At last Spence broke the silence.

"Well?" he interrogated, without turning from his study of the distance.

Jimmy withdrew his gaze from the Fort.

"I was wondering when?" he grinned.

"We've got to get it all clear right now, Doc.," Spence said emphatically. He turned about and faced the other. "You've seen it all. You've seen all the folk. You've seen that poor crazy goat they've just buried. Tell us."

Jimmy nodded.

"Easy. Alphaine," he said. "Alphaine poisoning. We know now where it comes from. Where it's made. Bucket's hunting ground. It's up to you to pick up that fifty thousand dollars reward."

Spence drew a deep breath. The reference to the reward disturbed him. He was about to reply when a figure moving out of the Mission attracted his attention. The missionary was hurrying towards them through the low surrounding of scrub.

There was no doubt about Alof Lenoir's welcome. Spence nodded at him and kicked another bucket into place where the smoke drifted. Jimmy silently lifted a hand in greeting. Lenoir sat himself down. And his hosts understood the purpose of his coming.

The churchman's eyes were alight. Their eagerness, their purpose, made Spence feel that in this product of the Mission College he was likely to find a staunch ally. This newly-fledged missionary was no weakling. And he was intensely relieved.

"You've just come in time, Padre." Jimmy blew smoke heavily.

Spence removed his pipe.

"The Doc.'s going to tell us about things," he said.

Jimmy smiled.

"Just a chapter in human villainy," he demurred.

Lenoir searched the cheerful eyes, and his own were troubled. Spence waited.

"Yes," Jimmy went on after a pause. "It's a bad show. It's a terribly bad show. I've just told Spence, here. I know it. It's alphaine. Alphaine poisoning. And," he added, without a shadow of intended egoism, "I'm perhaps the only man in this north country who could have recognized it."

His smile died out.

"It's new. This alphaine, I mean. And that's the trouble in dealing with it. Until now I'd say it's been a close secret. But that's all over. It's the new drug that half the world of dopers are crazy for. God, I can't get these fools anyhow! If they only knew. If they'd only seen what we've seen to-day. Cocaine? Why, it's an innocuous balsam beside it."

He clasped his hands, and sat with his elbows on his knees. And his eager audience watched the play of his expression.

"I know all its deadly phases," he went on. "Its actions and reactions, because I was a pupil of the man I believe to be the world's greatest genius amongst chemists. It was he who brought it from the remote forests where the mountains divide Peru from the great Trans-Andean basin. But how it's passed out of his keeping and become a world-wide threat against humanity I haven't the remotest notion. It's already swamping the use of cocaine in this country. And the Government are at their wit's end about it.

"I was fairly sure of the nature of the trouble before I arrived here. You see, I'd seen the stuff the police found on a dead man they picked up down at Athaba. Then, when I read Spence's report I felt sure there was no mistake. But after what we've seen to-day, culminating in the death of that crazy neche you've just had to get buried, Padre, the whole thing's as clear as daylight. This settlement is saturated with the muck. Just saturated."

"And it comes from Bucket's hunting grounds?" Lenoir asked keenly, recalling the talk at the landing. "Was it he who—found it?"

"Made it, you mean," corrected Jimmy. He glanced at

the distant Gateway and shook his head. "I wouldn't say so. From what I've heard of Bucket I'm pretty sure he was only an agent. A worker in the organization of distribution. A sort of chief lieutenant. You see, this stuff is a manufacture. It's a crystalized distillation from a known botanical specimen. Here, smoke, Padre. Just sit around and smoke while I give you a headache. Got a pipe? Of course, you have. You wouldn't be a good churchman without one."

He held out his tobacco sack, and Alof Lenoir smilingly helped himself.

Jimmy watched while the other lit his pipe with a brand from the fire, and warmed to the man for the readiness with which he fell into the ways of the new life that was to be his.

"Now, about that old professor," he went on. "He was 'way out there playing around on holiday, somewhere, at one of the Amazon's many sources. That was his way. Holiday to him always meant the world's remote places where he could chase up any sort of queer growing thing in the interests of the science which was his very life. He was an amazing creature. Absolute fanatic. If he hadn't been the kindliest, most gentle creature in the world, I'm quite sure he'd have developed into a first-class poisoner. He has the discovery of more obscure herbal poisons to his credit than any other man in the history of science. That was his hobby. Herbal drugs. Fancy. Holidays in the dank remoteness of Amazonian forests chasing dope!"

The Missionary nodded.

"Fascinating," he said.

"Fascinating, sure," Jimmy agreed, knocking out his pipe and using it to point his story. "But reckless for an old man. He heard about a race of Indians in the Andean foothills. It was said they were merciless fighters who indulged in all sorts of orgies of slaughter. But it was not that which attracted him. The legend told of a drug they used before going into battle or hunting the forests for leopard and puma. It was a drug reputed to give them great courage, and which they manufactured themselves. And when the old man heard

about it he set off like a hound with its nose to the ground. The idea that there was, somewhere in the world, a drug that could transform a race of undersized, decadent, low-grade Indians into an army of fighting supermen, and he had no knowledge of it, was simply an outrage. At all costs he would prove the legend, or, what was much more probable, utterly confound it.

"He found them. Oh, he certainly found them," Jimmy continued with an ominous shake of the head. "He found all we've found to-day, only—worse. Would that be possible? Yes. I think so. He found a tribe of Indians that were almost white, which a few years ago had numbered upwards of one hundred thousand souls. There was only a handful left. A handful. And they were dying like flies from the same disease we've found here. I've all this from him first hand. You see, I was his pet pupil."

A sigh escaped the missionary. But Spence gave no outward sign.

"But that man was a chemist wholly and all the time. The Indians might drug themselves to extinction if they chose. That was their concern. He wanted to know. And was ready to pay any price for his knowledge. Oh, he got it. The place whence it hailed and the method of manufacture. It was an Indian secret. But he got it as he was bound to do. It doesn't matter to us how, whether by bribery, or threatening, or wheedling. It was a lichen. And one that is only just known to botany. There are hundreds of lichens, most of which are mere fungus. But this one, L. Peltasta Pulmonotes, is certainly the black sheep of the family, and only grows where the earth's conditions are sufficiently unwholesome. He found it at the snow-line of the mountains, and out of his amazing knowledge recognized it at once. It belonged to the cryptogamic species of stone lichen, so closely allied to the gyratus, which is a mass of concentrated foulness. He found that it covered the entire bottom of a large basin that had probably formed a mountain tarn in ancient days. But when he saw it the place was simply an

expanse of disgusting ooze. He returned to his jungle camp with a bale of the lichen and followed out the Indian method of manufacture.

"The result was even more fantastic and horrible than he'd supposed. First he produced the green liquor. Then, under the ordinary chemical treatment, the crystals, a fine green powder quickly assimilated as a snuff. Then, being the unconscionable fanatic he was, he handed his product to the Indians and watched the result. The Indians had no knowledge of the liquor. The powder was their common dope. He never told me all the details of what happened. Maybe they were the sort of things even a fanatic is ashamed of, and hugs to himself. But he told me this ghastly green scourge did all that was claimed for it, and—more. First, the amazing mental exaltation. The courage. The tremendous physical endurance and sense of well-being. Then, after prolonged use, disease, hideous, revolting. Such diseases as we have all witnessed to-day followed inevitably by death. Then its other phase. Dementia. According to the nervous temperament of the user."

He remained silent while he re-filled his pipe.

"Yes," he went on presently, with a sigh, "raving insanity. The sort of homicidal mania that sets the poor wretch killing anything or anybody with life. Then almost instantaneous collapse and death. That was the alternative disease. And these things were bound to happen after longish use in the form of snuff. But he was not satisfied with this limited experiment. So he resorted to the usual experimental field. Animals. He tried the stuff in liquid form by dosage and by injection. It was then he found out the terrible nature of the drug. One powerful dose was sufficient to produce either disease or insanity and death in a few days. And injection was the deadlier of the two. As the Indians knew the drug its use could go on for years. But the Indians being what they were knew neither caution nor restraint. From the first taste of the muck they were doomed."

He pointed back at the settlement.

"Alphaine," he said. "And if you saw the news sheets up here—I only get them weeks old at Athaba—you'd have read the accounts of outbreaks of a virulent form of smallpox all up and down the country. And *they're on the increase!*" He shrugged. "Of course, it's not smallpox. They've traced these cases to their source. It's the green scourge. Alphaine. And a Government reward of fifty thousand dollars should tell you something of the anxiety it's giving. It's for the man whose information leads them to its source."

"Which is Bucket's territory," nodded the missionary.

Jimmy gestured like a man suddenly grown weary.

"Apparently. Spence has located that."

Lenoir smiled gently at the obvious warning.

"The reward must be Corporal Spence's when we're through with our work," he said cordially. "I only have thought to save my people. That will be my whole reward. All I desire. That and punishment for the rascals engaged in this traffic."

"I'm sorry, Padre;" Jimmy flushed under the gentle rebuke. "But I'm jealous for this boy. You see, it's through his good work I've been brought up here to investigate."

Spence stirred uneasily.

"Maybe it's the hills," he said abruptly. "The snow line."

Jimmy cupped his chin on his hands and smoked thoughtfully.

"Why not? The snow line. Maybe a dry lake bottom. Or a muskeg. P'raps a plateau. I wish I had all the old man's knowledge. A small factory way out in inaccessible hills. Some fiend in human shape who knows it all, and is without a scruple. But how? That's what defeats me. How has the secret got out?"

"Where one man had discovered may there not be another?" suggested Lenoir.

Jimmy shook his head.

"The first sign of the presence of alphaine in the country only occurred after the old boy died," he said significantly.

The missionary nodded.

"The secret—stolen— since his death?"

"Might be."

Spence looked up.

"Where do the Kenyons come in? Someone tried to shoot him up?"

Jimmy smiled.

"We'll know that to-night."

"You'll get no information out of Andrew Kenyon," Spence warned, with a hunch of his broad shoulders. "I've tried."

"I think we will," Jimmy assured him quietly.

Lenoir was urgent for what appealed to him as the real work.

"But what's the next *real* move?" he asked. "I mean those hills."

Jimmy smiled at the churchman's thrusting vigour.

"I think we need to make Bucket's shack on the river," he said. "We'll set out in a week's time and see what his place can tell us. If it gives a clue we'll follow it right up. If it don't, we'll make a fresh expedition, and chase up those hills of his. It looks like that to me. And with you here to keep an eye on the settlement, Padre, it'll make things easy for Spence and me. And possibly we may get track of the fighting men who've been out since Spring, too. That also might be enlightening. Yes. I think that's best. You're wanted badly around the settlement, Padre. But, to-night may alter things. You can't tell. Gee, I look like being here years!"

"What makes you sure that Kenyon will talk?" Spence demanded almost brusquely.

The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"Professor Warren Kenyon was Andrew Kenyon's elder brother," he said. "June Kenyon is Warren's orphaned daughter, and co-heiress with her uncle. Warren was the

chemist who spent his holidays hunting herbal drugs in the world's secret places. I didn't know this till to-day at the landing. You see, I was only a student, and never met Warren's brother. But I remembered the long-legged, red-headed child who used to go about with the old man, and harass the life out of him with her escapades. Well, I saw her at the landing to-day. And she was grown into so beautiful a creature that I'd never have recognized her if she hadn't removed her fur cap. We'll go across to the Fort and see them now. Will you come, too, Padre?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE WILL OF WARREN KENYON

JUNE was standing in one of the deep windows of the living room at the Fort, and trouble was in the strained expression of her eyes, which were usually so smilingly serene. It was still broad daylight, although the hour was nearing midnight. The glowing sun was still searching the grim nakedness of a barren world. Where June stood the irregular line of the desolate lake shore looked to go on unending into the southern distance. Nor was there any growing thing to relieve its grey monotony.

Wadda Charlie had come and gone. He had left behind him the evening coffee on the table near the central stove. But the comfort of its aroma remained without attraction for the girl.

All through the evening meal with her uncle June had been obsessed by the news which had shocked them both that noon. They had avoided its discussion. Scarcely had there been a reference to it. But each had understood the other's preoccupation.

Bucket had been murdered. Bucket!

The murder of Bucket was quite beyond June's understanding. The "why" of it was too hopeless a problem for her to tackle. She had built up theories of which Bucket was the centre, and she knew that the news of his murder had completely upset every one of them.

But there was much more in the news to affect her than that. If it had been simply a matter of exploded theories June would have been left quite undisturbed. In her mind

she had always decided, and she had even definitely asserted it to her uncle, that Bucket was actually allied with the evil which they were pursuing. But if he was murdered by the same hand, the hand that had been on the trigger of the Mauser rifle that had attempted her uncle's life, and slain Mervyn Arden and his Indian, then what was she to think? What would Spence think? What would be the impression on the new man with the grey, twinkling, "seeing" eyes?

They could only think along the obvious lines. Bucket, and she and her uncle must all in some way, in some degree, have been associated. The thought revolted her.

The logic of it all was maddening. Bucket, the smooth, sleek detrimental, the man who lived hidden away in these northern wastes, the creature of cold cynicism, and stony evil, who had sunk to depths that were almost inhuman, would be listed in the police mind in association with her uncle. They would be coupled with him in some common purpose. It was unthinkable. It was all so unright. And yet, outrageous as the position might be, this insufferable conclusion looked to be inevitable.

Then there was a further distraction. When Spence and his companion found the murdered Bucket what else had they found? June knew what she expected they had found. But did they do so? And if they did—? She stood aghast at the damning thing it conjured up. It was too horrible.

Spence drifted out of June's mind and left behind only the man with the grey eyes. Her impression of Jimmy Paton had been more than favourable. She had at once decided that he was a creature of personality, of strong domination. It was not his manner. There was no arrogance or self-assertion about him. It was just a quiet, natural authority. A big reserve of knowledge, force. It was the live mind behind those pleasant eyes. What did that mind know?

June was young, eager, and brimful of womanhood. And so she prolonged her consideration of the man who had contrived to please her far more even than she knew.

Yes. He certainly had fine eyes: "seeing" eyes, as she

called them. Spence's eyes "saw," too. But they gave no impression of doing so. And, anyway, they were not of a steady grey. Then the young body, all leanness and muscle and big bone. Jimmy Paton was much more like an athlete than a doctor. Perhaps he was an athlete. Then his way of speaking. It was as simply pleasant as all the rest of him. She had liked the look and the eager vigour of the new missionary with the funny foreign name. But Jimmy Paton was the sort of man she not only felt she wanted to trust, and could trust, but whom she knew she undoubtedly would trust. He——

At that moment the girl's quick perceptions responded to the sound of movement behind her. She turned, and hastily left the window. Her uncle was standing beside the coffee table.

"Did you find Mr Lenoir, Uncle Andy?" she asked, as she possessed herself of the coffee urn and prepared her uncle's coffee.

Andrew Kenyon noted the girl's unsmilingness.

"No, Juny," he said, accepting his coffee. "I only found his man. That big breed he calls Louis Batteau. He's some big fellow. I guess these missioners know how to choose their river men. Lenoir was up at the police shack—in conference. I felt it best not to butt in."

"No."

June's agreement was pointed. They both sipped their coffee. Then the girl drank hers quickly and replaced the cup on the tray with a clatter.

"We've got to come out into the open, Uncle Andy. Right away," she declared, standing there very straight and still, with her clear-eyed gaze challenging. "If we don't," she went on, "we'll be branded fellow to that—that creature they've just murdered. And I can't stand for it. I won't stand for it. I won't have the police believing that you—you had anything in common with Bucket."

Andrew Kenyon nodded. He smiled quizzically at the girl's challenging attitude.

"It didn't so much matter with Spence here alone, eh?

But with this man, Jimmy Paton, it's a bit different," he suggested.

"Yes."

June stood her ground under the smiling eyes, but a flush crept into her pretty cheeks. And as he beheld it, her uncle, with a good-humoured chuckle, set his coffee cup down on the tray. He produced a cigar and tore off its tip.

"What's this conference about?" June went on quickly. "Bucket. Of course, it's Bucket. And you. And Mervyn Arden. All the shootings. All that's happening here, and on the river. That's why this Doctor Paton's here. And they'll talk of us particularly. Don't you see? We've been a mystery to Corporal Spence. He's accepted us under protest. Well, he won't go on acting that way—now. I knew the time would soon come when we must use these police. Our secret doesn't matter now. Doctor Paton's here because the police knew far more than we thought, and if we don't show our hand we'll be counted on the wrong side. In future we'll have to work with—them."

"Him," the man corrected quietly.

June's eyes flashed, brilliantly responsive.

"Yes. Him!" she said, with smiling defiance. "I like the look of him. And maybe I'll like him still more when the strength of his big body gets to work smashing the evil we're now sure lies in Bucket's hills."

Andrew turned to the window. Then he laughed contentedly and flung himself into his favourite rocker.

"That's all right, Juny, my dear," he said, chewing the end of his cigar with vigour. "I agree. And," he added with a nod in the direction of the window, "I guess we aren't the only folks who reckon the moment's right for a clean-up. Your good-looking doctor man, and our Spence, and that bright missioner boy, have all set foot on the old terrace outside. Go tell Wadda to pass them right in here. And have him set liquor out ready. We'll make things as pleasant as maybe."

. . . . .

The living room of the old Fort had suddenly taken on the appearance of a council chamber. Wadda Charlie had supplied the one touch that looked like anachronism. Bottles of liquor and glassware and a water carafe had replaced the coffee tray.

June's position was at the stove. The dainty toes of her evening shoes were poised on the steel rail of the stove, while she reclined with unstudied grace in a deep chair. Her intention was to be mainly a listener. She desired the talk to be done by her uncle, while she was there ready to support. She had no desire to be the centre of it.

Andrew Kenyon had kept to his chair and went on smoking. Spence was occupying a rigid small chair in which there was little ease. But Jimmy Paton had drawn a more comfortable seat close up beside his host. The missionary, alone, displayed other interest than the purpose of the visit. He sat himself nearby to June, whose vivid hair and beauty had made so deep an appeal to his priestly mind.

But none of them were prepared for the direct methods of Jimmy Paton. And least of all was June prepared for the way in which she was compelled to abandon her role of onlooker.

"I want you to forgive me, Miss June," Jimmy said, as soon as they were seated. "When I met you and your uncle at the landing this morning I was not as frank as I had a right to be. At that moment my position was just a little difficult. That must be my excuse. Now my difficulties have—" he gestured, "passed away. I should have told you then that such as I am in my profession, such knowledge as I possess, I owe entirely to the generosity, the kindness, the patient teaching of one man. Your father."

It was as though a bombshell had exploded at the girl's feet. She sat up with a startled ejaculation, and her eyes were big with wonder.

"My father!" she cried incredulously.

"Warren?"

Andrew Kenyon had swung round on his guest.

"Yes. Professor Warren Kenyon, the multi-millionaire President of the Norland Dyes Corporation, and founder, and first Principal of his Kenyon College of Chemistry, perhaps the greatest chemist on this continent, awarded me his gold medal, and a three years' scholarship at his wonderful College.

"It's queer how the small things sometimes develop in importance out of all proportion to their seeming." Jimmy went on reflectively. "Maybe you remember your beautiful home at Oakmount, Miss June. But, of course, you do. Your father and I were walking together in the park-like grounds one afternoon. It was a pretty great privilege for a mere student. We were arm in arm. Like bosom friends. Your father was talking, utterly absorbed in his subject. All of a sudden a human cyclone hit us. It was a slim, lank girl, all legs and bony arms, and with a mass of flaming hair reaching down to where her waist should have been. She demanded her father's attention. What a hope! Absorbed in his beloved science he 'shooed' that kiddie back to her schoolroom, and went on with his talk. Well, I saw and recognized that wonderful hair—it's cut short now—down at the landing this noon. I knew you at once, Miss June. And I also remembered there was a distinguished mining engineer in your father's family. A brother some ten years younger. And that talk you interrupted that day was your father's complete story of his discovery of—alphaine. He told me its source. Its potentialities. Its—terror. The only thing he denied me was the formula for its manufacture. It's almost like Fate that the police should have sent me up here now."

The girl's eyes reflected the man's smile while he reminded her of the days which seemed so very long ago now. But as he finished speaking her smile faded out and her sharp question came at once.

"Why?" she asked, and gazed down at the hands she held out to the warmth of the stove.

"Because this settlement is literally saturated with that

terrible drug. 'Fly' death? What a name! The Indians are poisoned. Dying. And will go on dying. This territory has become the new home of—alphaine. It's—being manufactured here."

If Jimmy Paton had looked for astonishment, any dramatic effect, he must have been disappointed. There was no sign of either. And he knew that he had been right in the decision that had brought about that meeting.

"Yet this morning you weren't—sure?" June questioned doubtfully.

Jimmy Paton shook his head.

"On the contrary. I was quite positive on the subject. I told you I wasn't frank with you. I'm sorry. This morning I told you it was one thing to discover the source of disease; another its cure. The source I think we all suspect. Certainly Bucket was deeply concerned. Well, we've got to prove, and then—cure. Now—will you tell me? I want all the story you and your uncle have to tell. I've a hazy sort of idea why you're here, but I want to know from you. I've laid most of my cards on the table. Now I want to see yours. And if the ace spots you hold are those my instinct tells me they are, I think the rubber should go to the little partnership we can form in this room here and now. Tell me why you're both here."

For a moment or two June stared at the stove. She was not reluctant to speak. She was in no doubt as to what she had to say. She was just pondering the queer thing that had happened. She was wondering, if, after all, she and her uncle had not been foolish in striving to keep the police out of the work they, in their amateurish way, had undertaken.

Her uncle bestirred restlessly in his chair. And instantly the girl raised her head with a little bitter laugh.

"We're here on a man-hunt," she said simply. "We're here to spend any time and any money to run a man, named Noel Maddox, to earth. He's here, here somewhere in these Barrens. And to our last breath we shall pursue him in an

effort to recover the formula of this alphaine you spoke of, which he stole from my father. We must recover it and—destroy it. We must go on till that is done, and all further mischief is made impossible. Money is no object. And our lives, uncle's and mine, don't count in any way. It's my father's dying wish. You see, our ultimate success is an unhappy, terrified, remorseful man's only hope of peace beyond the grave."

While June was speaking a slanting shaft of sunlight poured in through a window and fell athwart her hair. It lit a flaming aura about her head. And Jimmy, watching the play of the light, realized an uplift such as he had never before known. The simple, sturdy, even reckless determination of it. At that moment he wanted to speak and tell this girl something of what she had made him feel.

The eyes of all were on her. Even those of her uncle. Spence cleared his throat and continued to smoke. Alof Lenoir's smiling admiration could not be restrained.

Then the spell was broken. It was Andrew Kenyon. And he held out cigars to the young doctor beside him.

"Take one," he said in his bluff way. "Smoke. There's a long yarn to listen to." Then, as Jimmy obeyed almost mechanically, he glanced across at the girl. "Don't spare it, Juny," he warned. "The whole thing from beginning to end."

June turned her chair so that she faced Jimmy. And her hands clasped themselves in the lap of her evening gown. The aura about her head had faded out.

"First, I'll tell you when the trouble started," she began. "You knew my father, and, through him, alphaine. So I shan't need to explain how deep was the trouble. Two years before father died he had to discharge his secretary, who'd been with him twenty years, Noel Maddox."

Jimmy nodded.

"I remember the man," he said sharply. "A tall, lean, cadaverous and taciturn creature who seemed to hate the Kenyon College and all its students. I, particularly, was an

aversion of his. He was a chemist of no mean attainments himself."

"Yes. And he was dead 'wrong.' My father's wonderful brains had been his Eldorado. He had been making money out of them for years."

The girl's bitterness was intense.

"At last my trusting, simple father found him out," she went on. "And he was dismissed. Then, a week later, after he had disappeared with amazing completeness, the blow that killed my father fell with a crash. He discovered that the page in his private register of discoveries which contained the story of alphaine, and its formula for manufacture, had been deliberately cut out. It had disappeared with—Noel Maddox. Need I tell you of the distress, the panic into which father was plunged. I think not. He had never told me one word about alphaine. It meant nothing to me. But when he made the discovery he was nearly demented. I questioned him. I urged him. I begged him to pull himself together and get the police, the press to help to find the man. He refused every counsel. And the only thing I could get out of him was what I believed at the time to be a wild exaggeration. He said that the theft might mean the devastation of the whole human race.

"It was queer. Not knowing what you evidently knew of this drug, it sounded like raving to me, a nerve storm brought on by his loss. Even now I only have a glimmering of things. However, that was the beginning of father's last illness. He employed agents. He lavished money to track Maddox down. And, after two years, an almost demented creature, whose whole purpose in life had been for the good of mankind, passed in utter terror to his grave."

"Did he get no trace of Maddox at all?"

Jimmy's question was instant.

"Yes. That's why we're here," June assented, gazing thoughtfully at a ruddy patch on the side of the fire box of the stove. "You see," she went on, "father was always secretive about his work, and during those two years he was

doubly so. He kept everything from me. I just looked on helplessly, watching him die. So I knew nothing until Max Garland, father's attorney, read his Will to Uncle Andy and me, immediately after the funeral."

The thoughtful blue eyes turned from the stove and Jimmy saw how deeply the telling of her story was affecting the girl. But her determination was unwavering.

"Father's Will was as simple and direct as himself," she continued. "His great fortune of several millions was divided exactly in half between Uncle and me. My portion was left 'absolute' for my benefit. But Uncle's was not. There was to be a Trust. And the whole capital was only to become his when certain conditions contained in a letter had been fulfilled. We both read that letter—and after that we understood all the suffering he had endured."

The girl cupped her chin in her hands, and turned to the stove to hide the tears that were striving to overwhelm her.

"I can't tell you all that letter contained," she went on, choking back her emotion. "It was too, too pathetic. It was the last agonized cry of a terrified, lost soul. But it told clearly the thing that uncle must do to earn his share of the millions. It was from that letter we learned that just before his death father's agents had at last got on the track of Maddox. He had been seen on Moon Lake, making north. That was pretty certain. Then, the last thing of all before he actually died, had come an Indian story of a man answering Maddox's description having gone into occupation of a disused and almost ruined old fur-trading post somewhere in the Barren Lands. Its name was Fort Lindsay.

"One might well have hoped that such news would have helped father," June sighed. "But it was the reverse. The letter told plainly that in this latest development his worst fears were realized. Maddox had headed for a region known to produce almost every form of lichen. And as alphaine was extracted from a certain lichen, father knew that hope had gone. The man with his chemist's knowledge had determined to produce alphaine. In that letter he appealed

to us both. He appealed to Uncle as a man and a brother. The work of pursuit must go on. The pursuit must be continued relentlessly until the evil of alphaine was destroyed for all time. And to make himself sure that this would be done, only when Noel Maddox had been satisfactorily dealt with would Uncle come into his inheritance. All father's fear, his hope, his hideous terror found expression in the last paragraph of that letter."

June turned a pair of pathetic eyes upon her uncle.

"We know it by heart, Uncle, don't we," she said. "'I appeal to you both,' he wrote, 'in the name of humanity, and the affection we have shared together for so many years, let nothing deter you, nothing deflect you. Get Noel Maddox. Make his diabolical mischief impossible. And then, but not till then, I shall sleep at peace in my grave.'"

"So you both came—north?"

Jimmy's question came startlingly in the silence. The girl sighed deeply and passed a weary hand across her troubled eyes.

"Yes. We came searching for Fort Lindsay," she said, with a hopeless gesture. "And all we've found so far is this place, and all the hideous tragedy of it. Knowing practically nothing of alphaine we could not recognize the thing you've recognized. We've just plodded on searching, and gradually very gradually, we'd come to suspect. What else could one expect? Maddox was our quarry and through him alphaine. We knew no more. But when sickness came to the Indians who worked somewhere for Bucket, and Mervyn Arden and Spence saw more than disease in it, we, too, began to think. Then came the definite attack on Arden. Shot. Then disease and death. Then, following swiftly, the attack on Uncle. We knew then in some way the trouble here was bound up in the other, and that Fort Lindsay, wherever it was hidden, was a reality. We felt that not only had we discovered Noel Maddox's whereabouts, but that the man was alive to our pursuit. Instinct convinced me that Bucket was concerned with our man, and we even made him the

new direction of our search. But now comes your news that's he's been murdered. Slain, presumably, by those who slew Arden, and made the attempt on Uncle. That news has sent all our poor theories crashing. So that all that is left to us now is to turn ourselves over to the police, with such capacity as we possess, and our unlimited financial resources, and hope that you'll permit us to aid you by any and every possible means."

CHAPTER XXII

RIDDLES

THERE was something intensely pathetic in the sight of a spirited girl being forced to yield to circumstances that were too strong for her. Jimmy was glad of the opportunity it gave him.

"Your theories haven't crashed, Miss June," he reassured her at once. "On the contrary. Your instinct's dead right. Bucket had enough alphaine with him to prove his connection with Maddox."

June reacted at once. Her glad smile thanked him.

"Oh, I knew! I knew!" she cried. "Uncle was only half convinced, and was still less convinced when we got back from Bucket's place to-day. I——"

"You've been up to Bucket's shack?"

It was Spence who put the question. It came almost roughly. He had stood up from his small chair, knocking his pipe out into an ash tray.

The burden of June's trouble seemed to have passed.

"Yes. I made uncle go there with me," she said. "It was sort of to spy out the land. We knew Bucket was away, of course, and guessed we'd got a clear field." She pursed her pretty lips wryly. "But we didn't. Bucket had left a queer, grey-looking white man to welcome anyone with prying instincts. And when we talked to him we felt glad there were two of us, and we both had guns. He said Bucket was away down country, and we best come when he was around if we had a notion to see him. He was more than surly. He was distinctly hostile. And *he was some one we'd*

never seen before. But I'm glad we went. We did good work. You know it, Corporal Spence? The river up there? His place is on the bluff bank of a big marsh river that flows into the Thelon. And it comes, like that grey man we found there, right out of those hills. I believe it's the highway where the alphaine comes down to the man who must trade it. I'm—I'm convinced of it," she finished up intensely.

Spence made no reply. But his disapproval was evident. He shook his head and returned his pipe to his pocket. The more demonstrative missionary, however, was gazing at June in frank admiration.

"You went up there? You—a girl? You made that journey?" he cried incredulously.

June dismissed the matter with a laugh.

"Why not?" she said.

She regarded the man for a moment. Then the blue of her eyes became hidden and she spoke coldly.

"We can't afford to choose the risk to run," she said. "We shall go on to the end. It's our duty to my dead father."

The missionary stirred uneasily under what he felt to be a rebuke. Then he turned to the doctor who was observing him amusedly.

"But I don't rightly understand it all," he said, with a gesture. "You never said you found alphaine on Bucket. You think Bucket was out trading the dope when they killed him?" Then his busy brain seemed to become absorbed in his own perplexity. "No, I don't know it all," he complained. "You think Bucket had gone down river to trade his dope. On the way he's killed. Murdered. He's killed by a Mauser rifle——"

"The same kind of rifle that did the shootings up here, and tried to stop Doctor Paton bringing his help to us," said Spence grimly.

June's eyes widened.

"You too?" she cried excitedly. "They tried to get you?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Where?" barked Andrew Kenyon sharply.

Jimmy shrugged.

"Somewhere around where they got Bucket. They missed me, but looked like sinking my boat."

The missionary glanced from the doctor to Spence and back again. He felt he had just complaint.

"I'm getting it all—slowly," he said, with a rueful smile. "I'd no idea they'd tried to kill you on the way up. I wonder why they allowed me a free passage. Oh, well, perhaps a missionary—" He smiled deprecatingly and returned to his argument. "Well, Bucket's murdered and hidden away. But the drug he carries remains with him. He isn't robbed of anything?"

Spence shook his head.

"Not even of his cargo of pelts, which was his excuse for his trip. You're thinking—Vannie?"

The missionary made a helpless little movement.

"I don't really know what I'm thinking," he said perplexedly. "Except—except, that if there was no robbery, and he was killed by a Mauser rifle, then he must have been killed by those he was associated with. Now why?"

But Spence was in no mood to answer what he felt to be useless questions by a man whose calling, and the nature of whose work, could only leave him an onlooker.

"I don't see any use in this sort of surmise," he said bluntly. "It's not getting us anywhere. Bucket may have had a big cargo of the dope for all we know. And it may have been stolen. We don't know. We can't tell. We found him with a tobacco sack stuffed full of it. That's all. It may have been stuff he'd put by out of his cargo—for private trading. That's not our worry. The thing is, it proves his connection, as Doctor Paton says, with this crook Maddox. Miss June has the right notion, though she was wrong in making the trail herself. We're going to get after Bucket's shack. And, if Miss June's right, we're going to make that river. I'll get along now. But before I go I

want to say I've had pretty hard thoughts about you, Kenyon, and Miss June." He smiled. "I won't tell you where I placed you in things. Maybe it would make you feel bad. But right here and now I want to hand you all my regrets. And I want, before I quit, to say that you're just great folks I'm mighty glad to know."

Kenyon was on his feet, and standing at the table.

"And before you go, boy, you're going to take one stiff night-cap with me," he cried, pouring out rye whisky with a liberal hand. "And when you drink it, it's with the promise you'll just use us two folk to the limit, anyway you need, to run this crook to where he belongs. This looks to me like the big day for us all."

Spence gulped down his drink with a cordial nod.

"I'm surely going to use you, Kenyon—to the limit;" he smiled.

The missionary stood up. He, too, was preparing for departure. But he refused Kenyon's proffered night-cap, though in a manner which, to Jimmy Paton, suggested regret. Still he definitely refused it.

"I look on alcohol as medicine," Lenoir laughed mildly. "You'll forgive me. I'm prejudiced. But it's just the way I've—learned. I, too, would like to express my admiration for the self-sacrifice of you two people, and of Miss June's —er—reckless courage. I can only hope Corporal Spence won't forget to call on me for any help in my power."

He glanced round on the faces of all, and his gently smiling gaze came to rest on the policeman.

"Maybe my being a missionary makes it sort of unnecessary to admit me to the matters which rightly belong to the police," he said. "And I'd admit that's so anywhere else but in these Barren Lands. I've come here new, maybe green, to what looks like trouble such as I'd never anticipated. From the moment I arrive the spiritual and bodily care of these poor Indian creatures is mine. I find them sick, dying like flies, with insanity rampant, and Doctor Paton says they're being—murdered. Whether you want it or not,

Corporal, I shall do my duty as I see it. I shall take a hand in this matter and do my poor best to salve the human wreckage. I never thought the time would come when I should have to resort to firearms in my work. But all I've heard of the murder going on here makes it imperative that I'm equipped with those weapons of the devil. I shall send my man Batteau right away down to that trader, Vannie Smith, and purchase such weapons from him, and ammunition too, as he can supply."

The man was obviously hurt. He had tried to hide it. But he clearly resented the manner in which Spence had ignored him. His eyes were hot with feeling and there was inflexible determination in the thrust of his clean-shaven jaw. Spence could not let the matter pass. He knew the moment of crisis was approaching for them all. It would be fatal to have even a disgruntled churchman in their midst.

"I'm sorry, Mr Lenoir," he said quickly. "I didn't want to ignore you. I was quite ready to bring you with us here so you might know things. That should show you my intention. But there are police affairs that don't matter to a soul else but the police. And I saw no reason to pass them to you. This business is mainly police work. And you'll be helping us good, and doing your share, by helping the folk in the settlement and leaving the rest to Doctor Paton and me, and those who're so nearly concerned. You see, we've lost one of God's good men already, because in his zeal he took the sort of chances no police would take. I don't want you to take those chances, too. Believe me, you'll have no need for firearms around your Mission."

But Alof Lenoir was definitely determined. And while he smiled and appeared to accept Spence's explanation, he adhered to his purpose.

"Don't worry a thing for me, Corporal," he said coolly. "I'll take no ridiculous chances. And believe me, I shall do my duty in the fashion our beloved Josiah Varser would have me. I'm going to have weapons of defence if it's possible to obtain them."

"As to that," Andrew Kenyon laughed, "You don't need to buy Vannie's store guns. They're only fit for Indians. I've got an arsenal of good, useful weapons, including a Mauser, as Spence here knows. I'll loan you anything you want."

"No." The missionary was coolly final. "That's most good of you, Mr Kenyon. And I—appreciate the offer. But you, I fancy, will need every weapon you have since you will be actively assisting the police. Then there's Miss June's safeguarding. I would rather rely on my own resources. Batteau knows a good gun, and can use it, if I can't. If Vannie Smith's stock fails us then maybe you'll come to my rescue. I, too, must go home. I can see no rest while this terrible, terrible sickness plagues my poor people."

Spence took himself off abruptly with a brief "So long" and without ceremony. But Alof Lenoir had not yet reached that stage of intimacy. His farewell to June was formal. But at last he went, and Jimmy Paton's smiling eyes followed his sturdy figure as he passed out in the wake of the policeman. As the last sound of his retreating footsteps died away on the terrace outside he jerked his head in the direction.

"That boy's going to be no onlooker," he laughed, as he accepted the stiff whisky which Andrew Kenyon poured out for him. "If I'm any judge of a foolish man he'll get after this crook outfit on his own without so much as a worry. And like as not it'll be Arden over again. He's a zealot, a hot-head, and his reason is on a par with a school-kid. He needs chaining down, or we'll have—tragedy."

"Ye-es." June watched the doctor drain his glass with undisguised appreciation. And her approval of him was obvious. "Why didn't Spence tell him the whole story at once," she asked abruptly. "I mean about you as well."

Jimmy shrugged, smiled, and spread out his hands as he stood up to follow the others.

"The necessity just didn't seem to arise," he laughed. "After all he's a parson. Maybe he's a militant one. But

he's a parson. And, as Spence says, police work is police work."

Jimmy had picked up his fur cap. And Andrew Kenyon stood facing him with his back to the stove.

"Don't hurry," he urged. He glanced at the daylight beyond the windows "The night's young yet."

Jimmy held out a hand.

"I know. But it's mighty old for me. I've been at it since ever I rolled from my blankets this morning. I'm dog tired."

Kenyon nodded comprehendingly.

"I'd forgotten," he said. "Sure. Well——"

"I'll see you off the terrace," June said suddenly. "I must get a breath of air. This alphaine talk stifles me."

Jimmy saw her stand up, a creature of uncommon beauty in the dainty black frock which revealed the perfect whiteness of her arms and well-turned neck. He was more glad of her than he would have dared to say. He felt her presence there to be characteristic of the girl who was bred at Oakmount, the daughter of her splendid father. It was as characteristic as all the rest of both these people. They would live as they knew how to live even at the very end of the world, and under any difficulties. And they would achieve their purpose or go down with their flag flying.

June and he passed out together. The cool northern night was a sharp tonic that made the girl shiver and hastily fold the cloak she had thrown over her shoulders more closely about her.

But she had purpose in accompanying this stranger man. She had let Spence go without a word. He was of less account in her estimation. But once beyond the house she paused abruptly.

"Doctor!"

A chuckling laugh answered her.

"You know, the worst thing in the world anyone can do is to call me 'Doctor'! Just like that," Jimmy laughed. "Oh, I'm not ashamed of my profession, but it makes me think of sick beds and thermometers, and the bottles of dope

we hand out because they can't do any harm. Besides, I'm a chemist. Well, you can't, of course, call me 'Chemist'! That sounds rotten. You know I've never been called anything but 'Jimmy' in my life by anybody. Even your father. Sometimes they add unpleasant adjectives. But that amuses them. Now, I want to grin. I like grinning. And the name 'Jimmy' helps me that way. Doctor? Why, the sound of the word just brings a thunder cloud right down on my young spirits, and sets me yearning for the grave. Please make life easier for me."

June laughed. Jimmy's face had become unsmiling, and his tone was deadly earnest. But his eyes betrayed him. And she laughed delightedly.

"All right," she cried, "but I'm sure I wasn't known as Miss—June, when your observation rudely discovered angles and nobs on the red-headed human cyclone you once knew. This'll have to be a bargain between two people who're going to be fellow-conspirators. And being confederates you're going to overrule Spence when he tries to pack me in cotton wool and make me into a show piece. I want you to know—Jimmy—that I'm in this thing right up to my—neck. And if dear old Spence, who's the best in the world, doesn't play fair with me and use me the same as if I was another policeman, I'll go about it my own way the same as that missionary intends to do. We're laughing about it now. But that's because we shan't be able to do much laughing later."

June gazed squarely up into Jimmy's face and waited. She sighed her relief as he nodded.

"I'll do it," he said quietly, "but I don't like it any better than Spence does, June. You know crooks running dope are the last word in vileness. It's an awful responsibility, an awful danger. This thing isn't going to be pulled off without a pretty bad time for some one." Then he added whimsically: "You see, the Government's giving a prize of fifty thousand dollars."

But June dismissed the warning.

"That's all right," she said coolly. "I've got your promise, and I know you'll keep it. Now, Jimmy, I want you to solve me a few riddles before you leave this terrace. Tell me why Vannie Smith goes hunting caribou when Bucket arrives at his post? Second: Tell me why, if Bucket trades alphaine, he never goes farther south than Vannie's? Third: Who, belonging to—those hills, knew that you were coming up here for investigation, and so would want to shoot you with a—Mauser rifle? Fourth: And, suppose Bucket had found out about you, and laid the ambush against you to safeguard things for these crooks, why should he be shot with a Mauser rifle, too?"

The girl's big blue eyes were fixed on Jimmy's face as she propounded her carefully designed riddles. And as each one was put with cool deliberation, the man's admiration for the keen quality of her discerning mind increased. Not once did her gaze waver as they faced one another. Jimmy's replies came without any hesitation.

"Vannie goes shooting on Moon Lake because, from his post to Moon Lake is his stretch of the distribution organization. Two: Bucket doesn't need to go farther than Vannie's in consequence. Three: Bucket, according to Spence, did know help had been sent for. There was no secret made of it. Then there was the man, Ambuk, who went down with word. Bucket's associates, or Bucket even, would want to stop me. Four: Bucket was carrying alphaine in his pouch. Quite a big quantity. Maybe he was not trading honestly for his gang."

June turned from him. Her gaze was out over the lake at the hazy Gateway, already fading into the night shadows which were slowly obscuring the distance. Jimmy had answered her questions clearly, concisely, reasonably. And yet—Suddenly, she turned to him again. She held out a slim strong hand which Jimmy took in his.

"Good night, Jimmy," she said. "It's getting chilly. I must go in. Half your answers are good. But I think you've badly fallen down on the last two."

Jimmy was alone with the sound of a laugh that was not without mockery in it. The girl had passed into the Fort without a single backward glance. And as he stepped down from the terrace and strode along the shore towards the police shack, he felt that she was right. There was another explanation of Bucket's shooting and that attempt on himself. The whole thing had a deeper mystery than appeared on the surface.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOME OF A DETRIMENTAL

Eden Spence was at the tiller. Jimmy Paton was just forward of him, lounging in a thoughtful attitude on the narrow sitting-plank that ran fore and aft. Almost amidships was Sandy Alexander at the engine.

The boat was driving through a fierce chop of turbulent water. And it was less than a quarter hour since it had set out on an unruffled calm.

But that was the way of the lake which brooded the seasons away under the lee of the Barrier. In the winter it was frozen to its deeps, and buried under snow that piled mountainously for more than six months of the year. In the sub-arctic summer it was a thing of every mood. Where a brilliant summer sky had smiled down upon the world, while the motor-boat was at the landing, now a howling gale was driving out of the north, and the heavens were a-scud with a grey welter of storm cloud. It was something Spence fully understood. The mood would pass as swiftly as the storm of a passionate child.

The boat was pitching heavily. It was flung about, wantonly buffeted, as though in bitter resentment at its presence on the lake. Half the time the engine was racing as the screw flung out of the water. And progress was infinitely slow. But Spence held the bluff nose head on to the gale, waiting for the easement he knew would come.

Jimmy Paton had only thought for occupation. The fierce stormlet disturbed him not at all. He was thankful to sit there breathing the keen air that roared out of the

east. He was thankful that the Indian settlement with its horror lay behind him. He was thankful to feel that the moment had come when the root of all the misery behind him was to be dug for.

His detachment from the past week of heartbreak was an inexpressible relief. Physically, too, relief had been sorely needed. Young, strong, and brimful of enthusiasm, the work had nevertheless been overwhelming. The whole of every day, from early dawn till the closing down of the brief twilit night, had been occupied by a task which he knew to be without hope from the outset. Disease, suffering,ultimate death. No case less hopeless than the other. To Jimmy it had been more harrowing than the work in a hospital overflowing with incurables.

Then, in the midst of all the rest, had come the echo of the fierce beat of the flat-toned war drum throughout the settlement. It heralded the triumphant return of the slaughter-sated warriors, fresh from the shambles of victory. But it also told a dreadful tale of sturdy manhood drunk with a saturation of—alphaine.

There was, however, no outward sign of weariness in either of the men in the boat. Each sat in the storm-tossed vessel waiting for the gale to blow itself out. And each was just thinking his own thoughts without any desire for verbal expression.

For nearly an hour the gale howled down off the Barrier. Then came the easement. Spence flashed a swift glance at the sky. Then he turned to the horizon beyond the Fort behind them.

"She's veering," he observed shortly.

Jimmy withdrew his gaze from the clearly outlined Gateway ahead.

"Yes," he agreed.

Spence changed course to keep head on to the chop of the water.

"It's the craziest thing," he said, a moment later. "You'll see. She'll howl for another couple of minutes. Then

she'll flop dead out. I've seen her chase herself round the four points of the compass in as many minutes, shrieking from every new direction. Then quit cold as though some one had put the bellows away. It's clearing back south."

Jimmy looked back. But his gaze went no farther than the Fort that was already dropping below the horizon. He was vainly seeking a sign of those they had left on the landing.

As the policeman had foretold, the storm passed with amazing suddenness. Almost incredibly, too, the sea flattened out. And in minutes only the sun broke through the driving scud, and the world settled down again to its summer.

Jimmy thrust his cap back on his head.

"What d'you think of the stuff our bright missionary boy handed out back on the landing?" he asked.

"You mean his 'O-Kuk' yarn?"

Jimmy smiled at the policeman's tone.

"Human nature's a queer mix up," he laughed. "That boy's new. He's so new you'd be glad of a few dinges, a speck or so of dust, a dulling of the surface. Maybe we all have to be new brooms sometimes. Seems a pity."

Spence shifted course and headed straight for the far Gateway. Jimmy's gaze was pondering its crude magnificence.

"Some one's told him the great little fellei Mervyn Arden was," Spence said, with a shrug.

"Yes. He's honest and earnest. And——"

"Bull-headed!"

"And that's going to be our trouble, or—his."

Spence set his tiller, and filled and lit his pipe.

"Yes," he agreed thoughtfully. "A bull-head always makes for trouble. His own or some one else's. You know," he sighed, "old O-Kuk's as tricky as only an eighty year old neche can be."

"Lenoir seemed to think the old fox was dead worried," Jimmy mused. "What was it? Said his 'med'cine' had told him who the Evil Spirit was that killed Mervyn Arden.

Said he was very angry. And, according to Lenoir, looked it. Said his 'med'cine' had handed him the location that the Bad Spirit haunts. And that he, O-Kuk, was ready to show Lenoir. It doesn't sound good to me, anyway. But it looks as if that raw bird has swallowed the old man's worm —whole."

Spence smoked pensively with a watchful eye for the Gateway ahead.

"I guess O-Kuk travels the trail that suits his going best," he said presently. "He'll swear by his forefathers, his gods, and his totems, anything that suits his crafty purpose. When he goes out of his way to avoid me, and collect Lenoir to receive his information, why, there's—a reason."

Jimmy's eyes blinked argument.

"Maybe, of course, O-Kuk's dead honest," Spence went on. "I always reckoned he looked on Mervyn Arden like one of his crazy wooden gods. Then maybe he's really scared for his people. That's the best we can hope. But, on the other hand—" He shook his head. "No, I don't like it. That's why I warned that bunch of fool ideals. O-Kuk may have been got at. I've no doubt this boy, Maddox, and his outfit, are worried, seeing the way they're acting, and would be ready to bait any old trap. But if he's looking for the police to fall for O-Kuk's yarn, and take a hand with Lenoir, he'll need to go on looking. That Bible-pusher must play his hand if he feels that way. I can't do more than warn. I can't stop him. He's just bursting to show the world how much he can do on his own. And we can't look for wisdom till he's learned his lesson. Seems to me he knows Arden was a great little man, and reckons to go one better. And he looks like being as much help to us around Green Lake as he'll find in those bum guns his Breed, Batteau, 'll likely bring back from Vannie's."

"You're not impressed with him," Jimmy smiled.

Spence sucked heavily at his pipe.

"It's not that," he said. "I've always use for the man with guts. That's why I'm all out for the Kenyons. That

missionary's a man. He's a fighter. You can see it in his jaw, and the hot way he has of looking when's he stirred. But this thing doesn't need bull-heads. If he takes my warning, which I'm scared he won't, I'll be thankful. My hope lies in the return of the fighting men. That trouble amongst them may hold him to the settlement till we get back. And anyway, he won't move till Batteau gets back with his store guns from Vannie's. But I don't like it."

"No. June Kenyon's going to help hold him to the lake."

"You mean—?" Spence's thought was unmistakable.

"Not that way," Jimmy replied, with a smile. "Though it'll help. I asked her to do what she knew to hold him till we get back."

Spence smiled.

"I hadn't thought of that. There'll be no foolishness if she takes him in hand."

"And yet you figured she, herself, was taking a fool chance making Bucket's place with her uncle," Jimmy said shrewdly.

For some moments Spence remained silent, giving close attention to his course. With every moment now the grey bulk of the Barrier was leaping at them. Although some two miles or more divided them, the grey immensity was already reaching up to the heavens and threatening the tiny shell of a boat. The Gateway stood wide open, dark and forbidding, like the entrance to the very bowels of the earth And already the influence of the main outflow of the lake was drawing them to it with irresistible power.

"But not for the reason you figure," Spence said at last. "Miss June's no Bible-pusher just out of college. She's a thing of swell-tempered steel when it comes to a show down with your Buckets, and his kind. Ever seen that kid look over the sights of a gun? No. Of course, you haven't. Maybe you will, though. When there's trouble around, she's the sort of thing I want on my side all the time."

Spence's gaze remained unlifted from the water-race of the outflow.

"It wasn't Bucket or that grey-faced outfit he'd left behind him up at his shack that scared me for her," Spence went on seriously. "No. The man that fancies beating up Miss June and her uncle needs to be so bright and handy it isn't reasonable. It's the river she spoke of, Doc. And if I'm a judge she didn't just sit around and look at it. I know that river. It's my job to know this territory. It's just a water channel through the biggest, deepest muskeg man-trap in these Barren Lands. There's not a landing on its quagmire banks for more than thirty miles. A mishap! That's all. The boat. And there's not a hope on earth for anything without wings. I made it once. Only once. Never since. And it handed me the feeling of a jack-rabbit in winter with the yap of a she-coyote behind it."

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Jimmy watched the Barrier come at them. He was lazing in brilliant sunshine with the waters of the lake heaving gently under a cool, light breeze.

The approach of it was something awesome and it filled him with profound curiosity, too. Distance had gone. Only a narrow ribbon of shadow-blackened water separated the chugging motor-boat from the grey immensity. And somehow it seemed as if the boat had ceased to move, and the threatening mass was gliding forward, rushing at him without apparent movement, silently, crushingly, and with malevolent purpose. And the distance had held nothing comparable with the monstrous reality of the close-up of the overwhelming wall.

It lifted its grey bulk sheer from fathomless depths. It rose to dizzy heights. And the long, shadowed base line was water-eroded, so that the summit overhung perilously. Gazing up from the water-level Jimmy strove for an estimate of its height. But the thing was impossible. For its sterile, mist-crowned head was deeply plunged in a swirl of grey cloud, which gave an impression that the sadly drooping heavens found it their sole support. It made the whole

world look so small. Even, Jimmy felt, his own human consciousness was reduced to a thing of no account.

As he watched its onrush he was reminded that this thing had stood there perhaps from the very beginning of time. It was an imperishable witness to everything since light first shone upon a newly formed earth. It had seen everything; knew everything. Every secret of Creation. Yes. And it would go on through the ages until the end. Until the last of life had passed from a cold and barren world.

The grey mystery of it absorbed him so that the swift approach of the Gateway itself, was completely forgotten.

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The close-up of the Barrier should have prepared Jimmy for that which the Gateway might have to show him. But it was not so. From a flood of brilliant sunshine he had been suddenly plunged into a world of semi-darkness, of booming chaos. It was the broad low mouth of a tunnel which was completely roofed by a lowering belt of yellow, impenetrable fog.

For one brief instant Jimmy was the victim of his startled nerves. His body responded with an involuntary shiver. Then he sat crouched low and peering. He was searching the gloom which was alive with muffled, thundering echoes, lost in cold wonder and speculation.

The Gateway! It was filled with a broad expanse of heavily flowing water. Deep, and sluggish, and sombre, in the semi-darkness, its gloomy surface was more than forbidding. On either hand, remote and shadowed, lay the wide-flung containing walls. And the twilight was just sufficient to reveal, perhaps to exaggerate. These portals were by no means smooth or clean-cut. On the contrary. They were scored, serrated, and literally honeycombed by the boring waters. They formed a rugged background to an army of rocky fangs standing up in fierce defence of the parent cliffs. A cauldron of furious water was boiling in its

agony of strife about them, and the echoes were crashing with the din of the battle.

Jimmy pondered the spectacle with feelings of grave doubt. He thought of the absurdly small craft under him. He thought of their chances in the growing darkness ahead. Then he glanced up at the sombre roof of fog which lay so heavily threatening. What was it? How high? Surely not more than fifty feet above his head. If it came down! If it closed down on to the surface of the water!

He looked at the half-breed who was intent upon his engine, utterly unheeding the dangers with which they were surrounded. Then a glance at Spence smoking placidly at the tiller, looking as though he had not a care in the world, set him laughing.

"It would be hell if it closed right down on us," he shouted at the policeman.

Spence glanced up and shook his head.

"But it won't," he roared back. "It never does. Can't you feel it?" he went on. "The breeze, I mean. It's always blowing down this gorge. Sometimes more, but never less. Sometimes it sweeps the fog clear away altogether. It was clear all last week. But most times it's like this. It just blows this tunnel clear through the gorge from end to end, and holds the fog dead still above it."

Jimmy stared incredulously. His scientific mind was unequal to such natural phenomena. Spence blew his pipe with unconcern, while his calm eyes watched with cat-like vigilance.

"There's three miles of it—about," he went on. "The gorge narrows in presently. Then it's mostly dead dark. You see, the cliffs overhang bad just there. Someday, maybe, they'll fall in. If they did it would turn Green Lake into a sea, and wash out the settlement. When we reach the narrows the stream gets vicious, and the place looks like an arctic night without stars or aurora. But there's no worry. I know it all. It's my job."

Jimmy smiled back at him. It was Spence's job! Some-

how he felt that Dick Ferrers at Athaba had done his subordinate less than justice.

He turned again to the darkening outlook and settled himself down to wait and wonder.

It was as Spence had foretold. In a world of booming, raging water the darkness grew and the channel narrowed. Dangers there were, dangers on every hand. But Jimmy understood. A central course without deviation, and the raging protest was only so much bombast. The real danger would lie in any failure of the man at the tiller.

But there was no failure. Spence never hesitated. And his vision seemed of a cat-like quality. Straight through the black heart of the gorge the little craft chugged its way. And then, abruptly, without warning of any sort, the fog-roofed tunnel was left behind. And, in the heart of a heaven-designed valley, deep nursed between pine-clad hills of superlative beauty, Jimmy found himself blinking in a blaze of sunlight that was well-nigh blinding.

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The desolation of it all was almost unbelievable. The sky was overcast with the depressing grey of rain that was not yet falling. From nowhere, it seemed, came the low sighing of a wind that blew ice cold upon the bare flesh, and chilled even under the stout equipment of the northern man.

It was a flat. A treeless, marsh flat. It began somewhere where the sky fell to earth. And only ended just where they met again on an opposite horizon.

There was water in patches. Dull, gleaming lakelets, and the meandering channels of two great rivers. It was the same wherever the eye chanced. Water, with interstices that were reed-grown mud banks and stretches of granite flats, darkly tinted with the drab green of arctic growths. Then, from somewhere out of the complaining bowels of a despairing wind, came the harsh discordant throat noises of a teeming world of wildfowl.

A bluff of low scrub littered a moist neck of solid ground

at the junction where a tributary poured into the main river. It was the only spot where anything grew to a greater height than the giant arctic reeds. Not a single tree, however, reared its head to the restless wind. It was just a tangle of bush, sufficient to shelter a heavily walled habitation built within its straggling heart.

The home of Bucket had been set up with an eye to the river approach. It had also been set up with an eye to complete isolation. The only thing to reveal its presence from the river was the dejectedly leaning length of decaying stovepipe that lolled hopeless above the sheltering bush.

For all its surroundings, however, the place was weather-proof, and suggested even comfort. Bucket had built it for himself. And Self with Bucket had always been a thing to encourage his best effort. So Jimmy Paton and Spence at least found a warm, capacious, and dry abode.

The arrival of the police boat had been carefully unheralded. The journey from the Gateway had been without unnecessary delay. Sixty miles of wide open river, without any great difficulties to be surmounted, had made for rapidity.

There had been no concerted plan in the approach. Spence and Jimmy simply intended to search. And that in spite of any grey-faced guardian. In spite of any resistance at all.

They had arrived to find the home of Bucket completely deserted. There was no grey-faced guardian to threaten as he had threatened June Kenyon. There was not a living thing to greet them. Furthermore the house was open. And their immediate discovery was that the place had been invaded and ransacked from end to end.

It was startling and not a little disconcerting. The first discovery was of a forced entry through the door, which had been secured in no uncertain fashion. Then there were other signs at the front of the building that were sufficiently ominous.

Left to himself Jimmy would have spent some time over those first outward and visible signs. But Spence had his

own methods. A swift consideration of the door, hanging dejectedly on its wrecked hinges, and he led the way inside.

There were three rooms. One directly behind the other, and each with a communicating doorway that was curtained with patterned material. Each room was in complete disorder. Such home-made furnishing as there was had been flung about in every direction. Much of it was broken. And the grass-stuffed palliasse of Bucket's bed had been cut to ribbons and the dried contents littered about. Furthermore, even the reed thatch of the roof had been torn out and flung broadcast. It was obvious that not a single stick or container of any sort but had been scrutinized and carefully searched. Even the mud filling between the lateral logs of the structure itself had been raked from its seams. And the dry mud floors had been ploughed up to a depth of many inches.

Search? The place was wrecked with devastating thoroughness.

Spence and Jimmy had emerged into the open from the last lean-to room, which had been Bucket's kitchen place and store room. They were standing before the door which they had just swung to. It was a door of stout sail canvas stretched on a rigid framing. Some one had daubed a message on it with pitch. And the bucket containing the pitch stood nearby. It was a message of grim irony set out in block lettering—

LATE EH? WHAT NEXT?
N. M.

Jimmy was grinning. But there was no levity in the steady eyes of the policeman as he regarded the message. He shook his head.

"It's not clever," he said. "That tells us more than the feller who wrote it intended."

Jimmy was observing his companion intently. This man,

who was so calmly deliberate in his work, so apparently unimaginative, had a way of astonishing him at every turn with the clearness of his vision.

"When men deliberately leave tracks they generally leave more than they intend," he agreed.

"Sure!" Spence turned, and his unsmiling eyes held the other's. "N.M.," he went on. "That tells me Noel Maddox never wrote that damn fool stuff. I don't know him. You do. But I know crooks. The man clever enough to get away with what Maddox is doing isn't the sort of crazy guy who'll stand around offering the police a sneer like that. That message tells me that Noel Maddox hasn't been along to this shack searching for something. So we've got to locate who. There's things that jump right out at a feller. We know Kenyon and Miss June were along here after Bucket quit and got killed. They tell us they found a 'grey-face' waiting on them. Well?"

The policeman's eyes were coldly considering.

"The 'grey face' was here all right," Jimmy said sharply.

"How d'you know?"

Jimmy turned away.

"Come round to the front," he said, and moved off without awaiting reply.

Jimmy led the way back to the small clearing at the front of the house. He stood for a moment searching the face of the building. Then he turned and gazed at the entrance to the opening down to the river bank which had been cut through the scrub. Presently he walked over to it, and stood in it, facing the shanty with the two cotton windows and crazy, gaping door.

Spence looked on without offering a word. The doctor's movements were full of purpose. Jimmy came back to the building.

He was standing before one of the windows observing it through a large magnifying glass, and Spence became more interested. He could see a large rent in the cotton, and the material itself was discoloured. Then Jimmy stooped and

searched the grey, moist soil that was bare even of a single weed. After a while he stood up and beckoned. Spence joined him.

Following the pointing finger the policeman stared at the cotton window.

"See that stain? And that rent there?" Jimmy asked. "The stain's blood, and the rent looks like some part of a feller's anatomy was shot clear through it. Then look down here on the ground. Rubber-shod footmarks, and more blood. And something heavy's been lying here. We'll get inside again. And after that, if we want to find the rest of 'grey-face,' we'll maybe need to look for him amongst the worms and things bottom of the river."

He passed into the shack without waiting, and Spence remained studying the indications pointed out to him. Presently Jimmy came out with a cold laugh. He was holding something in his hand. He held it carefully in a piece of cloth.

"Here it is," he cried. "Or part of it. The boy who shot up 'grey-face' wasn't a deal worried with the traces he left. Looks like he just dumped the body and left the rest, and the fact he troubled to dump the body puts Indians out of the job. No. It wasn't Indians," he went on, holding out his trophy for the policeman's inspection. "This is a largish junk of a white man's skull. A white man with greying hair. And the mess someone made of that boy's head looks like a short range shot with a mighty tough charge of buckshot—or a soft-nosed bullet. Some one's been along. And," Jimmy jerked his head to indicate direction. "He didn't come from Maddox's camp to shoot up Maddox's man. I can't see June Kenyon standing around while her uncle blew another boy's roof to glory. You got to jump off another mark, Spence."

"Yes."

Spence looked on while Jimmy deposited the section of human skull, with its fragments of hair, on the ledge of the window, and wiped his hands on the cloth. He understood

the defence Jimmy had been making. It was quite transparent.

"You're right, Doc.," he agreed quietly. "But I wasn't really worried about Kenyon. I was just looking round things. That's the trouble. I've begun the wrong end. When we found that boy, Bucket, dead on the river I ought to have jumped for Vannie's end of things. We're through here for now. We can get right back. Then I'll beat it down river. I'm going to have Vannie talk a whole lot."

CHAPTER XXIV

JUNE TAKES A DECISION

June emerged from the dark interior of a teepee. It was at a remote end of the settlement where the lodges were widely scattered. And it was clustered about by a group of wind-stunted jack-pines of prodigious age. A diminutive squaw followed her out, and stood gazing after her. She was carrying an infant child supported on her broad back in the folds of a well-worn store blanket. And the child was whining as a result of the torment of flies that settled about its eyes.

The little mother was young. She was little more than a child. But there was no youth in the drawn features, or in the coal black eyes that burned gloomily as they gazed after her white benefactor.

It was a common enough story which June knew by heart. But its repetition never failed in its appeal. It had become everyday work, this succouring of a bereaved creature whose mentality and racial difference made possible only material help. The brown-skinned mother was manless. Like so many other cases it had been so since the return of the drug-drunk fighting men.

But June's hurried departure was not flight from the pursuit of sad thoughts. Wadda Charlie would be down at the landing carrying out the work she had ordered, and probably needing her supervision. Then, too, for once, she was not eager to encounter either of the other white workers in the settlement. Alof Lenoir would not matter so much. She knew he was completely absorbed in his own plans and

labours. But Jimmy Paton was another matter. She wanted to avoid those compelling eyes. She was just a little afraid of them at the moment. But only because she had something she very much wanted to conceal.

In the brief time she had known him, Jimmy had wrought havoc with that independence of spirit which June had always rejoiced in. With her uncle away, with Spence gone down river to Vannie's, she feared close questioning should Jimmy have discovered Wadda at his work. So, to avoid all awkward questions, she skirted the settlement on her way to the landing.

Just as she passed the last teepee, satisfied that she had escaped observation, Jimmy emerged from its interior.

. . . . .

Jimmy did not follow immediately. His mid-day meal would be awaiting him, but he was not greatly concerned for it. So he stood in the shelter of the trees making up his mind and smiling after the hurrying figure.

It had taken Jimmy Paton no more than one look into a pair of beautiful blue eyes to obtain an entirely new outlook on life. He knew that his whole horizon had suddenly become bounded by that tall, slim figure in its attractive trail clothing. June's beauty made its inevitable appeal. But Jimmy was not the type to succumb to mere physical attraction. It was the girl's spirit. Her intense loyalty to a dead father. Her robust courage and mentality. These things singled her out for his delight as no mere beauty could have done. He felt that June Kenyon was the most adorable creature in the world.

Nor, as he stood there looking after her, did it take him many moments to make up his mind that just now the landing was infinitely more attractive than a camp kettle of doubtful stew at the police quarters.

June was absorbed in the operations at the landing. The long double canoe lay moored in the water, newly tarred and with a burden of camp outfit already stowed in her. Wadda

Charlie had a pile of stores on the landing awaiting shipment. And the girl was considering them. She sorted them over carefully and set much of the pile aside as unnecessary. Then she pointed it out to the man.

"You know, Wadda," she said smiling, "outside a cash register, you're the most thorough thing in the world. I shan't need half this truck. The great thing on these rivers is to travel light. You'd send me out with half a department store."

Wadda eyed the pile of discarded stores, and his concern was real. Then he looked into June's smiling face, and there was the trouble and appeal of the faithful servant in his eyes.

"Missie June, I go on this trip?" he said. "Then I know you eat good an' sleep warm. I good, too, with the gun. We maybe need him. Your uncle come back, and he say: 'Good. Wadda Charlie, too. Miss Juny all safe.' Yes?"

The girl's smile passed. She was not displeased. On the contrary she liked it. But she shook her head.

"No, Charlie," she said. "You'll stop right here ready for Uncle Andy when he gets back. You needn't feel scary for me. I know it all. I've trailed these Barrens for two years, and if this trip shows me something new I'll be glad enough. Just get that truck in the boat, and tote the other back to the Fort. Tell Ma Gillian I'll be up along for food. I pull out right after."

She turned at the sound of hurrying footsteps. It was the coming of Jimmy Paton.

June's greeting, however, was without any sign of reluctance or displeasure. Nevertheless the man was not deceived. He looked at the boat. He eyed the stores. Then his smile sought the girl as he put the obvious question.

"When d'you pull out?" he asked.

"After I've eaten," June replied, with a flash of defiance she could not help.

Jimmy nodded, but offered no further comment.

June smiled back at her "doctor-man," as she always called him. Although she had tried to avoid him, now he was here she was contented enough. She had thought so much about him in the brief time he had been at Green Lake. She always assured herself he was "so different." And quite what she meant by that she hardly knew. Of course, she realized his wholesome good looks. But it wasn't that. It was the something that always seemed to be looking out of his whimsically smiling eyes. Then his understanding, his skill, his knowledge. She knew he must be very, very brilliant to have been her father's favourite student. And he always seemed to hold so much in reserve; strength, or understanding or sympathy, or something. Of one thing she was quite sure. He was going to make a tremendous difference on Green Lake. He was the sort of creature she had always hoped would come into—But she must get back to the Fort before—before——

Jimmy turned up-shore at the sound of voices. A group of aged Indians had emerged from the settlement, and were shambling their way down towards the bushes surrounding the Mission. They were easily recognizable as minor chiefs. And Jimmy watched them with no very friendly eye. Then June discovered the missionary and his man, Louis Batteau, approaching the Mission from another direction. They were talking earnestly as they came.

"More conference. More pow-wow. More neche fairy tales," she said derisively.

Jimmy inclined his head.

"And he'll listen to 'em all. The fairy tales, I mean," he said. "He'll swallow 'em whole."

"And get indigestion," June laughed.

"Yes. The sort of indigestion that might easily become fatal. I don't like that fish!"

Jimmy's tone was harsh and June was startled.

"Mr Lenoir?"

"No. That Breed. But I mostly hate Breeds anyway."

"What's he done?"

Jimmy gestured his feeling.

"I got him bull-dosing a poor sick neche, trying to get him to tell something. He's a typical Breed bully. He's a savage. And when Lenoir's not around to see he lets it all loose."

"Did you tell Mr Lenoir?"

"No. I told *him*." Jimmy's retort snapped. "You see, in a way I'm a sort of police officer. I don't know if it would have made any difference if I weren't. Anyway, he knows now if I get him acting that way again I'll club the life out of him."

June drew a deep breath. It was good to hear this big creature talk that way. She eyed her doctor-man and felt glad of his massive shoulders, and hands that looked to have been built for wielding that club.

"It's best not to tell Mr Lenoir," she warned seriously.

"No. Lenoir's a good man, if—foolish. Maybe he'd be better if he wasn't so obsessed by his calling. But that's the way of these college-made missioners. He's so earnest he reckons the world expects every sort of work from him. Even police work. Some boys go dippy when holiness hits 'em."

"P'raps it's as well he's got a Breed savage to nursemaid him," June smiled. "With Spence and Uncle Andy away these pow-wows worry me. Then, as I'm pulling out this afternoon and won't be here to keep watch on him, I'm afraid you'll have to see he doesn't act foolish."

The girl had turned. Her gaze passed from Charlie, who was collecting the stuff that had to be returned to the Fort, to the misty Gateway inviting her in the far distance. Jimmy was noting the camp outfit already stowed.

"Where are you making?" he asked casually, as Wadda Charlie moved off with his burden.

A smile dawned in June's syes. It spread to the rest of her face and she laughed outright.

"You're the one person I didn't want to have to tell that to," she said. "I'm going up that muskeg river at Bucket's."

It was said carelessly, disarmingly. Jimmy gave no sign. But every nerve in his body strung taut at the announcement.

"It's a longish trip," he said easily.

"Yes. I don't quite know how long. Wadda's outfitted me for every eventuality."

Jimmy nodded.

"Two automatics and a large box of cartridge clips. Is it war?"

June looked at him in silence for some moments. She was not smiling now. But deep in her pretty eyes there was a gleam of humour.

"Don't be nosey, Jimmy," she said at last. "But being a scientific man I s'pose it's second nature to ask questions. War? Of course, it's war. It's always war. It's been so for two years and will go on that way till——"

"It's made so you can't fight any more."

June glanced sidelong at the keen face that was now gazing out over the lake.

"You mean I'm crazy setting out on this trip without uncle?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"No. Without me."

June caught her breath. Then she laughed shortly.

"That would add to the risk," she said. "Wadda Charlie wanted to go. I refused him—for the same reason."

"How?"

June shrugged. Jimmy watched the movement of the slim, shapely, muscular shoulders.

"Alone I can steal up that river like a ghost. I can nose out the land. And if Fort Lindsay is hiding anywhere along its course I can locate it." Again came her short laugh. "I can do all that while our combined forces are—scattered. Then I can get back with time to spare for the big—rally." Her sarcasm was bitter. "I can pilot the expedition for its assault on Fort Lindsay."

"Yes. There's thirty miles of that river where 'there's

no landing for anything without wings,'" the man quoted.

Jimmy spoke quite quietly, and June experienced unease. Then he pointed at her canoe.

"A newly tarred—shell," he went on, somewhat contemptuously. "Get a look at its flimsy sides and bottom. A snag. You alone. A girl. That's before you get anywhere. Then if you locate Fort Lindsay, what's going to happen? It's crazy going—without me."

June wanted to laugh. She wanted to tell him of his vanity. But she did neither. She understood his solicitude. And, instead, she broke out hotly.

"Is it crazy? Is it?" she cried, and her pretty eyes flashed, and a deep flush transformed the weather's staining of her cheeks. "It's not half as crazy as the things we're all doing down here. What about our big talk together that night? What about pooling our effort? You remember? What's come of it? Two weeks frittered away out of our narrow margin of summer. What are we doing? Where are we? I'll tell you." She flung out a brown hand with a slim, pointing finger. "You and Spence went to Bucket's. What did you find? The place wrecked and a fool message daubed on a door. You found my 'grey-face' had been shot up like the rest. And you came back. What then? Spence has gone down to make Vannie talk—there." She stabbed the air viciously with her finger. "Did Vannie come up and shoot grey-face? And Arden? And try to kill Uncle Andy? And Spence has sent Ambuk down with an S.O.S. to bring Inspector Ferrers here in a hurry. Uncle's gone off by himself on a trip and refused to take me. Where? He's gone overland to the place where he believes Arden went—there." And again she stabbed at the air. "Then right here Lenoir's absorbing every neche yarn with all the foolish credulity of a kid just out of school, and hopes to make doings for himself; you're stopping around slaving to save folks you know you can't save: and I'm acting the fool girl just sitting around. It's all wrong. Hopelessly, utterly

wrong. It's wasting the brief time at our disposal. We want Fort Lindsay. That's all we want. And we must make it before our man can make his getaway. Don't you see? But, of course, you do. Bucket's river. The highway of his trade. I—I won't be put off. I'm going."

"But not alone."

A hot retort leapt. June could have cried out in her exasperation. But that which she would have said remained unspoken.

Alof Lenoir came hurrying down the shore from his Mission, and his earnest eyes were alight with excitement.

But as he reached the landing he, too, became aware of the loaded canoe, and he addressed himself to June in a manner that entirely ignored the man with her.

"A trip?" he said sharply. "You, Miss June?"

It was maddening. All the girl's plans seemed suddenly to have gone awry. First, Jimmy with his dictatorial manner. And now the missionary whom she had suggested needed a —nursemaid. But in her exasperation June found an absurd sense of humour.

"Yes," she said. "I'm the only one that isn't busy. So I'm going to locate Fort Lindsay."

Jimmy understood, and his eyes twinkled.

"Miss June intends to make Bucket's river, Padre," he said. "She's refusing all help. I'm trying to convince her she mustn't go alone."

"Trying?"

June's good-humour had returned, and she laughed happily up into Jimmy's face.

"He's been threatening me," she added.

The new-fledged missionary's manner became more portentous. He shook his head.

"He's right," he said solemnly. "I mean to—persuade. Oh, he's very right. Your uncle's away. He would never forgive us. I only know what Corporal Spence told us of that river. It's quite impossible for a—girl. Quite. I couldn't dream of letting you go with your uncle away.

Then Fort Lindsay! Think! What would happen if you ——?"

He broke off. The gesture of his hands was expressive of the hopeless ridiculousness of the thing she contemplated. The girl's face hardened ominously. Jimmy saw the danger signal, even as he watched the missionary's movement with hands that were almost effeminate in spite of the effects of his new life.

June turned away and gazed over the lake.

"I'm sorry you both feel that way," she said stiffly. "I'm going, nevertheless."

The missionary laid an appealing hand on the girl's arm.

"I'm sorry, Miss June," he said, with some show of contrition. "I was clumsy. I didn't mean to put things that way. It was just my concern. Of course, you will go, if you choose. But I came here with such good news. News of this very thing you are going to seek, that it seemed to me to make your journey wholly unnecessary. I've got the last news I've been waiting for. They brought it to me at the Mission. I know now just where the Indians go to work, just where this criminal Maddox prepares his poison. You are quite right. It's Fort Lindsay, an old ruined Fort hidden in those hills. And it's on that river of Bucket's, too. But there's another, a shorter way to it. The way the Indians go. And I've procured guides who will show me the way, and even take me right to the Fort. I've had to work hard to get the news. The Indians are terrified of this man. But it was the murder of Arden that roused the fighting men that have just come back. Their fear of Maddox was not comparable with their anger against him. Now, won't you wait till I get back? I'm going with Louis and the Indians right away. Then, when your uncle returns——"

June shook her head. And Lenoir went on urgently:

"I shall come back with good news," he cried. "I know it. I feel it. I can see the end of this scourge in sight. There's only two white men, and one white woman there, the Indians tell me. That's all. No one else but a few

Indians. I shall have no mercy. Louis and I are well-armed from Vannie's store. Yes. I'm sure I shall come back to you all with the best news——"

"Or like Arden you may come back to die," said Jimmy grimly.

"Die?" The Missionary's eyes widened. They were burning with a hot light of ecstasy. "You think that?" he cried, with passionate derision. Then he shook his head. "That's in the hands of the Almighty. But even if I come back to die like Mervyn Arden, it won't be without having completed my work. Then, if need be, I shall be well satisfied to die. But we're wasting time. I just came to tell you my good news. Now I must go. Louis and I set out right away. Miss June," he appealed finally, "won't you wait till I come back? It'll be safest for you."

The girl remained silent. She did not even glance round at the appealing face.

"I'm sorry," Lenoir went on with a sigh. "But I shall get there before you. Yes, I shall certainly do that. And, at least I will have made Fort Lindsay safe for you when you arrive."

"Safe? How do you mean?"

June's eyes were wide as she gazed into the implacable face.

The missionary shrugged. He indicated the settlement.

"The Law doesn't spare the murderer when proof is forthcoming," he said. "Then there is the murderer against whom no proof can be brought. Is he to be spared for that reason? I don't think so."

The sturdy, militant creature turned away abruptly. He hurried back the way he had come. And June, and the man beside her, gazed after him. The girl sighed. Jimmy's eyes were smiling with appreciation.

"He's a tough little proposition, June," he grinned. "Tougher—a lot tougher—than I had any idea. Missionary? Man of God? Why, he's enough to set an East Side gunman hollering."

"I think we've misjudged his—capacity," June said thoughtfully.

"Misjudged?" Jimmy threw up his big hands. "He's made me feel mighty thankful I was never your father's secretary."

June continued to gaze after the retreating figure. Just as it passed into the bush about the Mission she turned to the man beside her and her hand gripped his arm.

"Jimmy!"

The man turned at once. But the girl's eyes were hidden.

"I've—I've changed my mind."

"You're going to wait around till—he gets back?"

"No. You must come with me."

Jimmy patted the brown hand on his arm.

"That's all right," he laughed. "I was coming anyway."

CHAPTER XXV

BUCKET'S RIVER

The paddles dipped with scarcely a ruffle of the water. The canoe drove swiftly against a stream that was almost imperceptible. Distance was being devoured rapidly. The breadth of the great river made niceness of skill in keeping to the fairway unnecessary.

So June, piloting the little craft, left herself free to think and gaze, contemplating those subtle apprehensions which her desolate surroundings conjured for her.

She gazed up at a curiously swaying flight of ducks overhead. There were thousands strung out in an irregularly-shaped V. She had seen them from their first appearance on the northern horizon. And she continued to watch them till the last stragglers had passed on their southward migration. Then she returned to the sad moist world about her. And, after a while her short laugh broke the silence.

"And year in, year out a white man who's known the best his world could show him has lived here alone, and—kept sane," she said. "It's just incredible."

Seated against the forward strut of the canoe, with his big back turned on her, Jimmy Paton replied without glancing round.

"You think he was sane?" he asked doubtfully. And his words came quietly on the light stream of air that whined out of the north.

June laughed again.

"Is anybody sane—quite sane?" she retorted. Oh, Bucket was sane as we count sanity But think. Water. A

waterlogged world. Miles—endless miles of it. Not a foothold, but on that moist spit of land where he set up his shack. A ghastly death if his boat should fail him. But that's not all. Association. Human. An unpeopled wilderness of countless miles beyond the Gateway. It just appals when you think."

"But the freeze-up," Jimmy suggested.

June dipped her paddle with added force.

"Worse. A thousand times worse—for me," she said. "The gloom of the Arctic night. The ghostly lights. Then the snow foxes, the mangy coyotes and the grey wolves. Starving. Prowling. Seeking their summer caches of white hare and lemming and anything of warm blood to hearten hungry bellies. He must have had the nerve of a superman."

"Or of despair. I think Bucket lived here because there was no other corner of the world where he would be permitted to live. That's if he was sane."

"I wonder?"

June eyed her doctor-man's broad back. His thin cotton shirt, loose about his big neck, with its sleeves rolled so that his forearms revealed the immense strength that delighted her woman's senses. All that was primitive in her rejoiced in the companionship of this smiling creature who had not hesitated to bend her will when it conflicted with his own.

She remained silent while the sluggish water slipped away under her paddle, and the low, muskeg banks dropped behind. They had left Bucket's home that morning. They had camped there the night. Now they were on the thirty mile stretch which Spence had warned had no landing for anything without wings.

The still blue sky was without a cloud. But its sunburnish had lost its summer gold. It was a day of intense brilliance and moderate warmth, with the sun already telling of the approach of that time when its sole function in the northern world would be to light a steadily briefing day.

And, in the far northward, a mist sat heavily on the horizon.

A dotting of bald snow crests thrust up to the sun through it and gleamed mistily. They marked the wide-flung range of hills towards which the canoe was heading. And they were the only relief from the flat muskeg world about them.

The dour of it was eating into the girl's heart. She pondered those other flat spaces of the world she knew. The prairies. They were gracious. They were rolling. They were delicious in their subtle perfumes, and the luxuriance of the rich grass that promised generous husbandry. Their monotony made for delight. This, this territory of ooze and shaking tundra beyond the Gateway, was nothing but a battle-ground for the elements. A fiend's playground where wild life alone could endure, and man must lose his reason.

There were a hundred things on which June would have talked as the boat sped on over the shining waters. But somehow the thought of those miry banks without foothold, and the sullen depths of the water under them, held her imagination in a grip from which there was no escape. She felt like some poor spirit journeying on the Styx in a vain endeavour to escape the Hades to which it was condemned.

The hours passed in steady labour and casual remark. The sun-glare reached and passed its meridian. Other wild-fowl winged up from the northern distance and passed on their southward way. The whining, restless, wind breath sighed like some tortured spirit. Giant reeds creaked and rustled beyond the banks as their sun-ripened stems bent to the breeze. And harsh voices from the water wastes intensified the utter stillness.

The afternoon wore on without the slightest variation of prospect. Nor was it until the low sun approached its western couch that the mechanical dip of the man's paddle ceased and Jimmy pointed ahead. The great spread of the river was lessening. And the low banks were displaying an inclination to lift to a higher level.

"That's Spence's first 'solid,'" he said, craning about so that June saw again the clean-cut features which so surely

pleased her. The sight brought a prompt, answering smile of gladness to her own.

"We can't afford to take chances," Jimmy went on. "We'll keep right on till we're dead sure we can make the bank in deep water Say, it's a nightmare reach, and I'm glad it's through."

Jimmy's eyes had no smile in them now.

"And you reckoned to make this alone," he added, a moment later, resting his paddle athwart the boat and passing one weary hand across his brow as though to brush away a memory that was full of ugliness for him.

June's smile deepened.

"Life's made up of the crazy things we just want to do," she said lightly. "I hated you, Jimmy, when you told me I was a crazy thing."

The twinkle crept back into the man's eyes.

"And you don't now?"

June's happy laugh was sufficient answer.

"Good," he cried, and dipped his paddle afresh. "We'll get right on and look for camp."

. . . . .

It was a bald knole standing well up from the river level. It was moss-grown and sun-baked. And it was without shelter in any direction.

It was one of a number of low hummocks shaped rather like old-fashioned, giant, straw bee-skips. The moss covering was yellow and sun-dried, as were the summits of each of the neighbouring hummocks. The scorch of the Arctic sun had served them mercilessly. It was the first of the low foothills of the greater range ahead.

The twilight of night was deepening over the hushed world. Myriads of stars were already struggling to reveal their glittering eyes. And a half-moon showed up with a face of frigid pallor. The river below was alive with the incessant night-song of its creatures, which was stabbed, at frequent intervals, with the bull frog's harsher note.

The camp on the hummock was the simple resting-place of the long trail. There was no pretence of more than the barest necessity. A low A tent was set up with its opening just beyond the moss-fed fire, which was the main need of the moment. It was June's shelter.

Jimmy's sleeping bag and two coarse blankets were laid out in the open nearby to the fire. And scattered about was the usual litter of cooking.

The girl and the man were squatting over the smoulder of warmth which seemed to have hypnotized them into a sense of drowsy comfort.

They were both weary. A day of many hours of light but unceasing labour had carried them clear of a zone of infinite danger. It had been wearing mentally and physically. And now was reaction. Lethargy had assailed the girl's vigorous faculties, and her thought was without definite drift. It was broken. And sometimes, even, she realized its dream-like distortions.

She was hazily trying to sort out the possibilities of that which lay ahead waiting on them. She was endeavouring to visualize the ultimate discovery of Maddox's hiding-place, and the manner in which they could achieve their purpose. But drowse confused all continuity and robbed her of inspiration. She could only remember that they were fully armed for defence, and enjoyed the sense of security it afforded, and reiterated to herself the fixed determination to find, without themselves being found.

And in all June's thought there loomed the knowledge of the presence of the big creature beyond the fire. His personality dominated every thought, every hope. And by degrees she forgot all the rest and contented herself with gazing through the light drift of smoke at the hunched figure opposite her.

Jimmy's fine head was dropped slightly forward. His heavy pipe was lolling in his mouth. His work-stained, and none too clean hands were clasped about his drawn-up knees. But to June he was a picture of manhood infinite in its appeal.

She soon wanted to laugh at the fantastic thoughts that flashed chaotically through her tired brain as she watched him. She found herself regarding him as some ruthless, brutish captor into whose hands she had fallen. She was held there prisoner, waiting to hear the destiny he willed to be hers. It seemed to her that in reality she was his slave, there to do his bidding whatever that might be.

Nor did the thought aggrieve. On the contrary, happy satisfaction lulled her, and a subtle content made the absurdity of her thought very, very alluring. She was under no illusion. All unacknowledged she knew that this big, huddled creature was in reality set up on the golden throne her woman's soul had designed to receive it.

Jimmy's mind, on the contrary, was intensely alert. There was no chaos in it. There was no influence at work other than downright consideration of the task in hand. June was his care. It was a wonderful thought. And even the object of their journey was forced into second place by it. June! Her well-being. Her safety.

His thoughts of the girl were big, and clean, and very human. And because of them, for the first time in his life, he knew the urge of real anxiety. For days to come June would depend on him, look to him, defer to him. And the wonder of it stirred him to the depths of his manhood.

It was he who was first to bestir. One hand detached itself from about his knees. He removed his pipe and held it pointing. While the whimsical light in his eyes caught the reflection of the fire.

"You know, June, I thought you crazy wanting to make a lone trip," he grinned. "Now, I'm sure you were crazy making it with me." He chuckled. "It looks to me we're both ready for the boy with the straight-jacket. Have you thought of those thirty miles we've just come? I've got that poor shell of a canoe fixed in my mind. And all the time I'm wondering at the bad time Providence must get worrying for the world's best fools. Had things gone any way wrong we hadn't the chance of a thirst-crazed sailorman

on a poor line raft in mid-Atlantic. I can swim. And I've seen you swimming. But you can't swim in muskeg mud —unless you're an eel."

Jimmy's grin only emphasized the worry behind his words June understood.

"But nothing did go wrong," she said easily.

Jimmy let go of his knees, and his hands went up in the air in mock helplessness.

"Nothing did go wrong!" he echoed. "That's a woman. That's where her nerve's got a man beaten all the time."

June reached at the stack of dried moss and flung a pile on the fire. She watched a thickened column of smoke belch upwards.

"A woman's never got a man beaten—any time," she said quietly. "Do you know why nothing went wrong?"

Jimmy returned his pipe to his mouth.

"Because the luck of the game was running with us."

June shook her head, and her eyes remained on the fire. Her pretty face was more serious than she knew. She pulled her fur cap lower down on her red head, so that it covered the tips of her shell-like ears.

"No, Jimmy," she said. "Because—oh, because the whole weight of worry was sitting on a man's broad back."

She tried to speak lightly. But the earnestness of her eyes betrayed her.

"You know, a woman's the most capable creature, when her mind's on her work, and when the job's something she knows. You can't beat her in her own line. That way I think she's the—stronger sex. But get her worried, have her guesssing what's to happen next, and you don't need a gun to make her throw up her hands. I know that—now. I didn't when I planned my lone trip."

She shook her head.

"Just as surely as we're sitting in the middle of nowhere now, long before I'd cleared those thirty miles I'd have been looking for a landing. I'd have tried a landing! And then ——!"

"No," she went on, after her quick gesture. "I couldn't have stood it. On, and on, and on!" She smiled with child-like content. "Instead I've my tent fixed right. I've a swell fire that makes me feel good. And I've eaten a wholesome supper that would have shocked a society dame. It's a man who fixed all that. And I'm glad. I just hate eels, anyway."

His inclination to laugh failed Jimmy. A queer sudden awkwardness made him avoid the girl's smiling gaze, and he stared at the tent.

"I'm scared of a wind storm," he laboured. "I'm not bright fixing a tent right."

His awkwardness seemed to be infectious. June, too, seemed suddenly to have become absorbed in the tent.

"I've never used it before," she said. "Uncle Andy wouldn't let me. Said it was only for city folks. Wadda insisted on my taking it this time. I always use just my sleeping sack. But," she added quickly, "I like having my tent."

Jimmy smoked heavily for some moments. Then he emitted a profound "Yes."

"It makes for comfort," he added.

"Oh, yes. It does."

June's agreement came eagerly. And presently Jimmy nodded at the tent.

"Keeps you from getting rained on," he muttered.

"And from night chills."

June looked up at the amazing vault of the night sky. An hysterical inclination to laugh took hold of her. The sky was without a cloud. Northern lights were hovering. A million jewels gleamed down at her.

"I don't think it'll rain or blow," she said after a long pause.

Jimmy risked a glance at the up-turned head beyond the fire. And as he did so a mad impulse surged in him. The intense silence of the night, the immensity of the void, the utter solitude about him, seemed to urge all that was primi-

tive in his soul. Wild desire almost suffocated him. He felt he must leap across the fire and possess himself of that wonderful creature sitting there. He wanted the warmth of her fair young body crushed furiously in his arms. He wanted the joy of her pretty lips pressed to his. He wanted to search the fathomless depths of her soul through the lovely blue eyes that had such power to madden him.

But he never moved. Not by a single sign did he betray himself. The storm just raged in the race of his pulses, and deep in his honest soul. His moment passed as the sound of June's voice came again.

"We're going to win out, Jimmy," she said, in a thrilling tone. "I know it. I feel it here." She pressed her hands over her bosom. "We weren't crazy to come. We just had to. We couldn't help it. We're going to find Fort Lindsay. We're—and then—and then——"

"We're going to get a deal we hadn't figured on."

Jimmy's eyes were smiling again. But it was a steely glitter. He was entirely master of himself, with his whole mind concentrated.

"What d'you mean?" June, too, had forgotten everything else.

Jimmy shook his head and knocked out his pipe.

"It's not going to be easy, June," he said. "It's not going to be even as we expect. We're building on this Noel Maddox. We figure he's the whole heart of the thing. He isn't. That is, not if I've got two grains of sense. There's a lot more than Noel Maddox."

"But we know." June's protest came sharply across the fire. "He stole the formula. He's been making the stuff and selling it. He's murdered the Indians—Arden. He tried to murder Uncle Andy!"

"Yes? Did he murder his own man, Bucket? Did he try to murder me? Did he murder your 'grey-face' who he'd set in charge of Bucket's shack? My dear, there's another element in all this killing. An element we don't know of, and can't guess at. It's a three-cornered struggle. And if

I can see right, a two to one chance against Maddox. It looks like any moment it can become a two to one tug against each corner. It's going to be tough. And I think we two are going to be right in the thick of it. Now, you just beat it to that tent of yours," he said kindly, standing upright, tall and very large. "Don't lie awake guessing. Leave that to me. And if your tent falls around in the night don't cuss the fool hands that set it up, just feel sorry for 'em."

Jimmy laughed and turned to his blankets with a casual "Good-night."

CHAPTER XXVI

SPENCE TURNS THE SCREW

KATE SMITH dismissed the Indians roughly and without scruple. She had had enough of them. A half-hour of vain effort, endeavouring to bring off a trade that suited her, was sufficient time to waste. So she watched them reluctantly go from the store. Then she went out, secured the place against surreptitious invasion, and set off down to the landing on the river. Vannie was there. She had seen him gazing out down the river, and over the restless waters of the lake for the past hour. And she was concerned.

Kate's waddle was aggravated by her hurry. The round, questioning eyes were marred by a frown of anxiety which was an expression of the woman's devotion. She was breathing hard, and voicelessly anathematizing the stones which hurt through the soles of her big boots.

Vannie's watch on the river was a daily affair now. The moment he rolled out of his blankets in the morning he visited the landing for at least an hour. He would use any excuse during the day to continue it. Then, at evening, when the day's work was over, as it was now, he would remain there till he turned in for the night, morosely searching the distance, silent, gloomy, and unapproachable.

Kate knew. There was not a sign or action in this man of hers she could not interpret unerringly. And what she read now was—fear. The man was afraid! Fear? Vannie scared! It was the most amazing, worrying development she had ever been called upon to witness. Fight had always been the natural element in which this savage thrived. She

had never known him to fear a thing in the world. On the contrary. It had always been her natural woman's shrinking from danger that had excited his most profound contempt.

It was not good. Her shrewd senses warned her. Something deep and subtle was undermining Vannie. And she believed she knew what it was. He must be taken to task right away. And so she hurried to him to pass him the rough tongue of her sympathy and encouragement.

Vannie knew she was approaching, without turning from his search of the distance. It was her heavy gait, her breathing, and the rattle of stones as she angrily kicked them from her path. He was wrapped in his own thoughts and concerns. And these things were not for her. He mentally cursed her, and ignored her coming.

But at no time in their years of life together had Vannie ever found an adequate deterrent when Kate's mind was made up. So, when her rough voice greeted him, he turned obediently.

"Ain't you seen all you're needin' of this old river, Vannie, boy?" she asked sharply. "Mornin'. Noon. Evenin'. It's all the time now. Right along. Every day. Why don't you quit it?"

She paused in the hope of reply, but none was forthcoming. An ugly frown deepened on the man's unprepossessing face. Kate heaved her stout shoulders in an aggressive movement while her gaze followed the direction of the man's across the lake.

"You got spirits buzzin' about your head, boy. That's what you got," she went on goadingly. "An' in a while they'll get you beat, sure. What you lookin' for? Bucket's ghost? That's what's worryin' you. Bucket's ghost."

The man grunted and spat.

"Ther's no come back for Bucket," he laughed harshly.

Vannie towered, a mass of powerful manhood. He turned and surveyed his wife for some glowering moments.

"You're a fool woman, anyway," he stated at last. And turned again to the lake.

"Am I?" Kate's retort snapped violently. "You cut that stuff right out, boy. You can't get away with it an' me standin' here and seeing you scared like a jack-rabbit. You're scared to death. Why? It's that roll of money you brought back from Moon Lake. That stuff Bucket was waitin' on when he got all killed to pieces. You're scared there's folks'll come along an' you'll need to hand it over. It's on your mind. An' when they come it—won't be easy. Fool am I? I ken see through you clear as daylight when the sun's shining."

"I ain't handin' it to a soul," Vannie growled in a surly but confident tone. "Not to a soul. Ther' wasn't anyone in that trade but Bucket an' me. I don't know a soul else. Well, ther's no fool stranger comin' along for me to hand him twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty thousand!" Kate's eyes were so round and widened that the big pupils looked to be starting out of them. "You never said a word! Twenty thousand!"

The man's heavy face was grim. The lurk of fear, however, looked out of his hard eyes which held to the distance across the lake.

"Then I guess you do need to watch the water," Kate added, after a moment of profound wonder. "You surely do!"

Vannie turned and spat again, and glanced southward down the river. Then he grinned at the woman who meant more to him than he knew, in a manner that was meant to be kindly.

"Tcha!" he ejaculated savagely, "I don't know why I stand around talking to you! You leave me alone. If ther's folks yearnin' for that money I guess I'm ready for 'em. I'll be dead before they touch it. You get that. I'm scared of no livin' man who reckons to hold me up. But I mean to be ready for 'em. Beat it an' fix supper. I'll be along up."

But Kate made no move to obey. Her eyes were far gazing and full of thought. And queerly enough there was none of the fear in them that lurked in Vannie's.

"Vannie, boy," she said, and her tone was almost gentle. "I'll go beat it an' fix that supper for you to eat. Will you make it the last you eat right here? Twenty thousand! That with the rest looks good to me. It looks so we can set around an' get old easy where the sun shines good. We need to get right out—quick. We need to go before another night goes over our heads. You're a good man. I guess you can do all you reckon to those who want your dough. But why hand 'em the chance? Think of the——"

Vannie's hard face turned. His fierce eyes burned into the plump, round face that had become so urgent.

"You got it wrong, woman," he growled moodily. "You mostly get it wrong, anyway. You're born that way. Say, I'm not worried for the folks behind Bucket. It's Green Lake. The folks there. I'm wise to the things moving. Some of 'em. An' they got me feelin' ther's some sort o' volcano burnin' somewhere. An' one day it'll go right up, an' maybe we'll go with it."

"Then let's get away from that ol' volcano," Kate urged with a smile. "We can fix the boat to carry our personal outfit. We only need that, an'—the dollars. We can pull out at daybreak to-morrow, an' get right away—south."

Vannie withdrew his great hands from the waist of his breeches and gestured.

"Not till I've seen Spence an'—told him," he said.

"Told him what?"

The question was sharp, and the woman's eyes searching.

"That ain't fer you, old gal."

Vannie shrugged and turned to the lake again.

"I've a mind to go up there," he muttered to himself. "If he don't come down river I'll have to." He raised a hand and thrust his fur cap back from his low forehead, and smoothed his sunburnt brow. The worry of his movement was intense. And Kate read it, puzzled but unerringly.

"Won't you hand it me, Vannie, boy?" she coaxed.

"I tell you, no!" The denial burst out of the man in

fierce exasperation. "It ain't fer you, Kate. It ain't, I tell you. Not on your life. It's——"

He broke off and raised a hand pointing at the far shore of the lake.

"That's a boat!" he cried excitedly. "That's—is it a kyak or—a police boat?"

Kate looked, following the pointing hand. Then she spoke.

"I'll go beat it an' fix that supper, Vannie," she smiled. "It's the boy you want. It's Spence."

. . . . .

There was a comforting sound of broiling which came from beyond the open door leading into Kate's living room at the back of the store. The odour that drifted to the nostrils of the two men was no less appetizing. Kate was busy with her belated supper. And an Arctic hare, since Vannie was glad of Corporal Spence's arrival, seemed the best diet to fit the occasion. Some beans and strongly cured bacon seemed to her to be the natural accompaniments, with coffee to help it down. Yes. She would prepare the best she could provide, and keep her ears very wide open. Vannie had some secret of grave importance that he was keeping back from her. And, for the first time in an anxious life, she felt that Vannie was not treating her to a full half share of his life.

But the open door was not permitted to remain. Vannie moved over to it the moment Spence had propped himself on the fuel box that stood just under the window in the store. He closed it. But he first thrust his head into the living room where he signed an unspoken warning to his woman.

Then he moved over to the outer door and closed that, too. Then he vaulted to the stout built counter behind which was stacked Kate's trade. The store was all careless, slipshod, and primitive. But goods of every description of value to Indians and white folk were there in plenty.

Spence was smoking and his eyes were reflective.

"Well, I ain't nothin' to hide up, Corp.," Vannie said, as he settled himself, and bit a chew of tobacco from a fragment of plug. "You want information an' I guess I was never more ready to hand it you if you'll just say where it's headin'. I ask you that for a dead gut reason. I never was a boy to yearn for wings, or any sort of fancy halo. I'm just out to make a living for my woman and myself, and to stand on the right side of iron bars—if possible. But I got to make that living. And it don't hurt me to know there are those bars around. I fancy bein' good friends with the police and everybody else. But I can look after myself good. And I'm goin' to. If the stuff you want from me's goin' to look dangerous that way I'm a tight shut clam you couldn't beat open with an axe. Get me? Show me what you want—an' the reason—an' if I can see the sun shining around I'll talk all you want."

Spence nodded. And to Vannie's appraising eye his whole personality was worth considering. Vannie was powerful himself. He had every confidence in his own ability to defend himself in any physical encounter. But he felt that he would be glad enough to keep this sturdy, cool, steady-eyed creature placated.

"That's all right, Vannie," Spence returned coolly. "Fortunately for you there's no law—yet—that governs the trade you've been mixed up with. So you look to be well clear of those bars. Later, I guess, there will be a law that prohibits it. And if you're still carrying on you'll find yourself up against it. You get me? The trade you're mixed with isn't a crime against the law. Only against—humanity. That's where you're safe. That's why you can afford to forget the clam act. I've come all the way down from Bucket's place north of the Gateway to hear you talk. And I'm going to."

Vannie's watchful eyes were boring.

"What trade?" he asked sharply. The words snapped in the quiet of the store.

" Alphaine. The deadliest drug in all the world."

If Spence looked for any reaction there was none forthcoming. Vannie's big hands moved expressively.

" That don't tell me a thing," he growled. " I don't know it." There was a moment of challenge as the two men gazed squarely into each other's eyes.

" Yet you've been trading it right along." Spence's manner was that of announcing an unimportant fact.

" That so ? Then you know more than me."

There was not a movement. Spence sat there sucking his pipe, his narrowed eyes watching through a fringe of lashes. Vannie had turned his chew over into the other cheek, and the gleam of his wicked eyes stabbed its way across at the man on the fuel box. Then his head began to shake slowly from side to side.

" What I've got to say, Corp., you won't believe anyway," he went on. " An' I can't rightly blame you. The only thing is, it's Gospel. Sheer Gospel truth. I ain't ever heard of alphaine an' wouldn't know it if you showed it me. If that's what I been trading it's new on me."

A glimmer of a smile eased the tension of Spence's regard.

" Queerly enough, Vannie, I do believe it," he said. " I was pretty sure you were trading blind. Now, here's my knowledge of you. You're a link in the chain organization that's been handing out the stuff that's poisoning this country from end to end. Bucket passed it to you. And you passed it on. And you got your pay. I don't believe any, except Bucket, of those who passed it down the rivers knew a thing of it. Unless they steal it on the way, and either taste—or snuff it. The stuff is a one man secret, and a one man manufacture. And the secret of it he's ready to defend to the limit. I'm handing you this to put your mind easy, so—you'll talk. I want anything you can tell me, seeing Bucket's been murdered and your trade's shut down—for awhile. And I want you to feel there's no come-back on you for—the crime of it. Well ? "

Vannie sat for so long in a sort of brooding silence that

Spence feared he had misfired. But Vannie was thinking. And Vannie's thought was a laboured process. But it was also very thorough and very keen. He knew the sun places were shining for himself and Kate. They were the goal of his hard-bitten life, and he had no intention of jeopardizing his chances of reaching them. So he considered laboriously. At last there came the negative wagging of his bullet head.

"No, Corp.," he said, with a world of finality, "I can't help you much that way. I'd be glad to. An' that's on the level. But I'll talk. I'll say quite a big piece. An' I'll tell you right here I've been yearnin' that way ever since I came up from Moon Lake where I was out on a shoot." He grinned slily. But it was only a flash. "I'll tell you right away, if you hadn't got along down now I was so crazy to talk I was goin' to make Green Lake chasin' you."

He chewed solemnly for a few silent moments. And Spence just watched.

"Here," Vannie went on, with a movement of his burly shoulders. "I'm on the level, an' I believe you are. All you've said about my share in that trade is dead right. This is my hand laid pat. Something over two years or so ago Bucket came along down and asked me if I was lookin' for easy money, and could forget to talk, and knew how to use a gun quick. Did I feel that big money was worth a police boy's life—if necessary. I told him it depended on that bigness. He told me ten per cent of values running into many thousands of dollars. And I told him I didn't believe any p'lice life could be worth so much. He said he'd try me out. And if I didn't make any fool mistake I'd pouch all the dollars I needed. He said, by way of making things pleasant, that if I made one mistake I wouldn't live to make a second. He said I'd tote parcels down to Moon Lake where I'd be met by a boy in a motor-boat who'd take the trade and pay over dollars. I'd know what I had to collect from him, Bucket. I asked him the sort of trade. And he told me, short, that was his business. Feeling those dollars in my roll I just laffed easy and said get busy an' pass the

stuff. An' he's passed it me right along ever since. An' each time I've made Moon Lake—after a few birds or caribou. That's the whole play as far as I'm concerned, Corp. The whole darned play. I know no more of this—this alphaine than if I'd been born yesterday."

Spence nodded and refilled his pipe. Vannie watched him, and his eyes had lost their boring intensity. There was a return of that queer fear that was so foreign to them.

"I get all that," Spence said, scratching a match and relighting his pipe. "And it's mostly the way I reckoned. You had to tote the stuff, hand over, receive payment, and —shoot on sight anyone who interfered with you."

Vannie's eyes were boring again.

"There's been a lot of shooting up and down the river," Spence went on smoothly. "There was Mr Arden. His neche, Skeets. Andrew Kenyon was shot and wounded. There was an attempt to shoot Doctor Paton down here, on his way up. Bucket's been murdered. So he wasn't here for you to hand payment to him. And the last I know of is some boy who was up at Bucket's place while he was away."

Vannie shook his head.

"Bucket was shot with a Mauser. You told Kate that. I haven't a Mauser. I wouldn't know a Mauser from a blow-pipe. I haven't been up Green Lake for more'n a year."

"I know that," Spence said, in his quiet way. "But you were down river—somewhere—when Bucket was murdered, and Doc. Paton was shot at from the river bank above the big falls."

"I went down the river. An' I come right up the river," Vannie countered sharply. "The rest of the time I was on the lake, or—on the Keewin River. An' I ain't got anything but Winchesters."

"The Keewin? Why?"

Spence had stood up. He had moved to the window, and stood with his back turned.

Vannie slid from the counter. He came across to the window. Spence gave no sign. And Vannie's tall body leant towards him.

"That's why I was crazy to talk. That's why, if you hadn't got around now, I'd have made the trip to Green Lake. I tell you, Corp., I'm worried to death. I've been that way ever since I made the Keewin. If I'd had savee I'd have been right after you as soon as I knew you'd been here, when I got back. But, you see, I was in this trade, and didn't know rightly how I stood. An' anyway I figgered I hadn't call to butt in on p'lice work. Then, seein' Bucket had been done up, I began to see things, and my worry started. An' you tell me there's been another killing up your way. Say!"

Spence was looking up into the man's brutish face. There were beads of sweat on the low forehead under the hay-like hair. Even Vannie's wicked eyes made no attempt to conceal his agitation.

"What's amiss on the—Keewin?" Spence asked sharply.

For some moments Vannie stood staring through the window as though gazing on some dread vision that sent his blood running cold. And Spence watched, feeling that his journey had not been in vain. Suddenly Vannie bestirred in the manner of a man flinging off a loathsome spell that held him paralyzed.

"Will you make the Keewin with me, Corp.?" he asked eagerly. "Will you come along right down—now? I tell you it's got me so I can't sleep o' nights without seein' it all again. I ain't squeamish, Corp. I'd as lief shoot a boy up who pulled on me as eat the supper Kate's fixin'. But there's things I ain't got the guts for. An' that play on the Keewin's one of 'em. Will you come? Right now? An' I'll show you?"

"What?"

"What? God!"

Vannie threw up his hands.

At that moment Kate pushed open the living room door.

She eyed the two men without friendliness. Then her announcement came without any invitation in her voice.

"Supper's fixed," she cried, and the door slammed-to again.

"We best eat," Vannie said, and his manner was without any of its agitation of a moment before. "She'll raise hell if we don't. I'll tell you when we're through, and—she ain't around."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAMP OF THE DEAD

The silt was everywhere in submerged banks. The stream was heavy, swirling and heaving in a manner full of threat. The shallows at the mouth of the river where it streamed into Moon Lake made navigation a matter for the closest watchfulness, and created an urgent desire for some element of good fortune.

For once in his life Vannie Smith was enjoying the privilege of travelling at leisure. That is in the sense that no physical labour was required of him. Nevertheless his was the actual piloting. He sat facing the bluff bows of the craft, flinging back sharp orders which Spence, at the tiller, instantly, and without question, obeyed. Sandy Alexander, in the absence of Ambuk, nursed and fed the motor.

The weight of the stream had been increased by recent rains but without adding depth. That was the trouble. Without added depth the reinforcement made for greater turbulence amongst the shoals, and submerged rocks.

After half an hour of anxiety, with the vessel flung about like a feather in a gale, the deep waters of the lake swallowed up the last of the shoals and the boat breasted the choppy swell under a stiff breeze that came sharply out of the west. Relief was instant. And Vannie scanned the wrack of cloud that robbed the heavens of their summer cheer. The greyness of the outlook more than hinted at the latenes of the season.

"Guess we pulled a bunch of luck, Corp.," he observed contentedly. "That's if she don't blow harder than this.

She'll be right behind us when we swing to the Keewin. Looks like a quick trip."

They were driving across the wind and the boat was rolling uncomfortably. Spence faced the wind, and stared at the threatening cloud-race.

"Hold her in towards the shore," Vannie urged presently. "We'll pass the flat where I was camped when I see—them things. You'll get it clear then. There's deep water. Plenty."

The boat ran in under the lee. And Spence saw the wide stretch of low shore backed by deep woods. The stretch ran right on to where the head-waters of the Keewin poured in churning rapids out of the lake.

After a while they drew abreast of a landmark for which Vannie was searching. He flung out a pointing arm.

"It was right there I was standin'," he said. "An' I was mad. Ther' wasn't a fool bird wantin' t'eat. I didn't get it either till I looked out south wher' the Keewin drops away. Then I see it. Right over there." He pointed ahead. "A thick smoke risin' heavy, dead straight like a pillar ther' wasn't breeze enough to shift. I been makin' camp one way an' another twenty years. But I never put up a fire smoke that way. An' it had me guessin'. It certainly did. Then I see a right smoke 'way off at that headland over ther'. See?" he went on, pointing back at a far headland to the west. "Well, I knew ther' was a p'lice outfit due around. So I got that easy. Anything from Athaba would need to pass that way. I figgered it a p'lice camp." He laughed shortly. "Well, as I hadn't a deal of int'rest in any p'lice outfit, an' didn't need their company back to my post, it looked good to me to run down an' see what was doin' on the Keewin. I slipped down the coast line quick."

Spence nodded. He gave no other sign and asked no questions. His eyes were far gazing as he stared back at the distant headland. He was thinking hard. He was visualizing scenes. Many scenes. And endeavouring to piece them together like a well-cut puzzle. He found it no easy matter.

Vannie's expansive information he understood. The man was justifying himself, for himself. He was creating atmosphere for acceptance of the incredible, hideous story he had already told.

They went on. The motor-boat thrust irresistibly. And the site of the trader's camp dropped away behind them. For upwards of two hours the low shore with its backing of forest slid by. Then, under the trader's guidance they swung to the mighty stream of the Keewin. Spence peered into the misty distance for some sign of the rapids where the land rose up to form the gorge of the river.

"Make across to the far shore."

Vannie waved an arm in the direction indicated.

"She's wide an' clear if you kep away from the near rocks," he warned. "She boils fierce along down the left bank. There's a simmer mid-stream. But ther' just ain't a thing but easy water on the far side. You could float a kid's toy that way without a worry. An' we can make a clean run down an' land right at that camp. I didn't. I cut in above it, an' kept to the bush. But I wasn't yearnin' till I knew what I'd find. An' when I knew I didn't yearn anyway. No, sir! It's six mile or so, I guess."

. . . . .

The river lay between cut banks that were densely clothed with sagging, water-washed scrub. Beyond lay unbroken forest that looked to go on to the ends of the earth. It was a world of sadly drooping, aged foliage.

Vannie's sense of locality was unerring. He picked up their destination and piloted the craft to its mooring with a precision that excited the policeman's admiration. The bluff nose of the sturdy craft ran in under an overhang of willow, and no sign of its presence remained visible. The landing was effected. Sandy Alexander was left in the boat for fear of accident, and the two white men broke their way through the bush.

It was a little unexpected. Beyond the fringe of willows

lay a widish clearing. It was a natural forest break for which there was no apparent reason. It was comparatively wide, and dotted with a few isolated trees whose height was dwarfed by the wall of towering sentry pines which lined its limits. Spence stood for awhile to absorb a knowledge of the general layout.

Under foot was rank weed and attenuated grass that was saturated with the moisture rising from the adjacent river. Here and there great broken boulders stood up out of it sheltering and nursing the scrub growths that found root-hold at their bases. And everything was shadowed and overborne by the profundity of gloom with which the twilit aisles of the surrounding forest blanketed it.

Vannie was unconcerned for these things which held his companion. He was eager for his own justification. He indicated a wide-spreading maple of magnificent girth and heavy foliage. It almost centred the clearing, standing alone with a suggestion of regal aloofness.

"That's wher' they fixed their camp," he cried sharply. "Ther'. Just clear of its reach. An' their truck was piled about its trunk. I was hid up yonder," he went on, pointing at the northern limit of the clearing. "Away in among them bare poles, hidden behind one of 'em. An' I see them at work. An' God!" he passed a hand across his gimlet eyes. "I just got it all till I turned sick in the guts."

Spence moved forward. He approached the tree without haste, almost as though he were reluctant. And he came to a stand where the rank weeds gave place to a burned patch that was more than thirty feet wide. Vannie was at his side and the two gazed down at it.

"Camp fire!" The trader exclaimed with harsh irony. "You ever had need of a camp fire that size on a hot summer day?" he asked. "See them ashes? They're more'n two feet deep an' they've laid there under the summer rains. Are they queer to you? The colour? Just drift wood ashes? Not on your life. That was a fire that would have melted bar gold. And the smoke that went up from it was like a

smouldering volcano. An' it was black! And it stank! God, how it stank!"

Spence eyed the vast pile of dead ashes for some moments. Then he reached out and stirred its surface with the toe of his boot. It was moist, sodden and gave the impression of greasiness.

"You won't find nothin' in that," Vannie said sharply. "They see to that good. That fire burned out in the night, and they raked the ashes come morning before they started it again. No. Ther's nothin' to that now. But I ken show you wher' they hid it up."

Spence stared up at the tree.

"How was the wind?" he asked sharply.

Vannie followed his gaze, and a look of perplexity troubled his wicked eyes.

"Can't rightly say—now," he demurred. "I wasn't worried with the wind. The wind's clean an' wholesome. This wasn't."

Spence pointed at the withered foliage, much of which was completely burned away.

"Looks like it came off the river."

He moved round the mound of ashes and passed under the wide canopy of the scarred tree. Then he reached up, and caught a low swinging bough. Flinging all his weight on it he passed down its length hand over hand. Then he stood holding it down firmly where a bunch of shrivelled leaves hung dead, but not actually burnt. He broke it off and released the bough. Vannie looked on, his eyes widening.

Spence examined the leaves with a close scrutiny. He handled them with light fingers, feeling them very, very gently. Then he examined his fingers. They were marked with a curious greasy soot. He smelt the leaves. Then, very carefully, he collected three or four of them and bestowed them between the folds of some paper which he placed in his pocket-book. He held out the remainder to the trader.

"Do you get it?" he asked.

Vannie took the branch from him, and the manner of his handling of it told Spence that he did "get it." It was curious. Vannie, a hard-bitten tough of no ordinary squeamishness, handled the tree branch as he might have handled a vicious, venomous reptile. He nodded, and dropped the thing hastily.

"I get it—sure," he said, and turned away.

Spence followed him.

"Where's the rest?" he asked.

Vannie pointed to a low mound of soil well away behind the tree, and which Nature had already done her best to conceal. Spence gazed at it. Then he indicated the river bank with a jerk of his head.

"Will you get that digger?" he asked. "We'll need to open that out."

Vannie's expression hardened with a sullen lowering.

"I'll get the digger, Corp.," he said, in a tone. "But I ain't touchin' that dirt. No, sir. I ain't come to that yet, an' I don't start now. If that stuff needs turnin' I guess it's a p'lice job."

"That's all right," Spence nodded. "Hand me that digger while I peek around."

Vannie lumbered off. And Spence spent the interim searching around under the great tree, and about the limits of the ash heap. Several times he stooped and picked up some small fragment. And in each case that which he found was carefully bestowed in his pocket. When Vannie returned with the required tool the policeman was beside the mound of soil waiting for him.

"Found things?" the trader asked curiously, as he gladly relinquished the implement.

"Enough to tell you weren't dreaming, Vannie," he said quietly.

"Dreaming!" Vannie shook his head. "Guess dreams quit with daylight. This didn't."

Spence was digging. The soil was light, and moist, and easy. And in a few minutes the work was finished. That

which he was seeking was there as Vannie had warned him it would be. Not more than two feet under the surface. First came a broad, heavy flat of stone. And under it—the rest.

Spence shovelled it all out. He examined it carefully. Considering each detail of what he found with a closeness that left no room for misapprehension. Then he carefully selected two smallish but very distinct items and tied them up in his coloured neck scarf. After that he replaced the residue, dropped the slab of stone over it, and replaced the soil.

"We're through, Vannie," he said quietly. "It's a pity you didn't come on the jump with your yarn right away. It's goin' to cost trouble you didn't. Hellish trouble!"

Vannie passed a heavy hand over his low brow and thrust back his cap. It was his never-failing gesture of perplexity and helplessness.

"I might have done. Guess I would have done, Corp.," he said, with obvious sincerity. "Only, you see, I was on that trade an' just hated to answer questions. Then, you see, I didn't understand rightly. I didn't see the game. It was only I'd got sickened. An' I couldn't help thinkin' an' thinkin' of it. An' so I sort of got worried an'—scared. Gee! I got scared. Me!"

"Yes."

Spence looked over the clearing, and his gaze was again revoltingly attracted to the tree.

"Aint' ther' nothin' I can do to help?" Vannie asked, after deep consideration. "Ther' ain't nothin'—alive—to scare me. I'm through with my trade. Me an' Kate are quittin'. You've acted white by me, Corp. I'd be glad to pass you a hand."

Vannie's native shrewdness was at work. He saw his best advantage and grabbed at it with both hands. He wanted to put himself on the side of the law now Bucket was dead. Spence understood.

"And I'd be glad to have it," he smiled. "Will you

make back to Green Lake with me? It's liable to be tough."

Vannie laughed. And his ugly mouth open made his face even less attractive.

"Make it as tough as you fancy, Corp. I'm with you. An' I'm glad."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MISTS OF EVIL

Cradled in the heart of the hills the great tarn shone darkly. Its waters were still, profound, and sullenly beautiful. It was like a sheet of dark glass reflecting in its bosom an inversion of glacial slopes, cloaked in gossamer mists, a foreground of primordial forest, and the steely light of a sun that had no power to rob the mountain air of its chill. It lay there with that threatening quiet that suggests a condition of suspense, waiting for the supreme moment when it would churn itself into furious life under the frigid lash of hurricane sweeping down from the frozen hill-tops.

The hush of it all was curiously unreal. Sound was there in many directions. There was the boom of crashing ice thundering into abysmal depths under the melting influence of summer-time. At intervals, too, there was the wild-life voice of the forest. And, again, there was the unceasing drone of falling waters which told of Nature's vent for the swollen burden of the lake. Yet the hush was only the deeper for these Nature sounds. It was as though it was utterly contemptuous of all efforts to dispel it.

This secret source of a lost river was skilfully designed. Nature had set up hills to encompass it. A chaos of lofty crests only to be penetrated through a labyrinth of tortuous and treacherous valleys. Then came a belt of aged forest several miles in depth. It was primordial forest. The sort that must have stabbed its early roots into the newly formed soil somewhere in the far off days of the earth's beginning. It was dark, and dank, and decaying. Then the final barrier.

A stretch of muskeg, more threatening, more deadly to all life than any lethal weapon of man's designing. It contacted with the waters of the lake. And it made approach impossible from any direction, except that long, northern shore which had been chosen by man for the site of his habitation.

A grey lichen-grown stone Fort had been set up on the northern shore where the forest and muskeg yielded to barren-granite foundations. It had long since become mellowed and discoloured by the storming years. It was an old, old fur trading post, no different from the many others which dot the far places of the remoter North. Even the stoutly masoned quayside that fronted the lake was as solid as the day it had been built.

But the long granite foreshore was the foundation of more than this primitive habitation. It formed the indestructible bed of a plateau that rose sharply from it, immediately behind the building. It went up to a height of some three hundred feet. And, reaching the whole length of the shore between two misty hills, standing sentry at either end, it sat like a dead flat saddle linking them, steep, rugged, grey, barren.

In ordinary circumstances the plateau would scarcely have been remarkable. It was a piled world where plateau and hills alternate as a natural condition. But its circumstances were not ordinary. It was a granite plain which extended for many miles. It was an unbroken flat, carpeted thickly with dank arctic mosses and every variety of drab-hued lichen. And it lived from year's end to year's end under a thin gauzy mist that was never still, and from which it never freed itself.

It was an evil mist. It was restless, searching, saturating. It came and passed on. It lifted and deepened. It swept with a rush, and came back without apparent reason. There were moments when it revealed a distorted, exaggerated world. There were moments when a terrifying blindness left its victim in outer darkness. It was never the same for

two succeeding seconds. And it never passed the cut line of the opening between the sentry hills.

It kept the plateau a secret place, only to be adventured when the hurricane winds swept down off the hilltops. But, even so, no storm had ever blown that could truly rid the plateau of its haunting demon. Under pressure it passed to hiding. It took to secret places amongst the hills. Corners, angles, and sheltered valleys that were safe from the gale. Then with a cessation of storm, a veering of the wind, even a relaxing only, it would emerge once more and re-possess its domain.

The Mists of Evil! Those who knew them, and could afford to do so, shunned the plateau in living terror. Those who knew the treasure they guarded cursed the evil of it all and took their chances. For, in the estimation of those who sought it, the treasure was far more priceless than their own poor human lives.

. . . . .

The sub-arctic day was waning. A man and a woman were at the quayside. They were there in silent companionship gazing out over the dead still water which lay shining gloomily under a slanting sun.

They were at the head of a flight of rough stone steps that went down to the water, and at the foot of which was moored a number of light craft. These were crude but serviceable Indian hide kyaks. There was a barge-like oomiak of similar make. Then there was a bluff, masted vessel of white man build.

The man was leaning on a rust-eaten iron rail, and his hands were thrust deep in the side pockets of his coat. He was smoking a cigarette whose aroma smacked of the East. He was tall, and thin, and his shoulders drooped, and his clothing had nothing to do with the northern world. He was clad in tweeds and his lean, almost cadaverous face was shaded by the brim of a soft, black felt hat. It was a troubled face, without pretensions to good looks. The dark eyes were

set in queerly hollow sockets, and they were cold and lifeless. It was a face that betrayed no feeling. No emotion. It had something of the grey frigidity of the glacial hill-tops about it.

The woman beside him, seated on a block of stone that had once been integral of a parapet defending the quayside, was young. She was obviously years younger than her man. There was no lifelessness in her shining eyes. She was a creature alive with the joy of being. She was good to look at in a showy sort of fashion and decidedly attractive. She too, was well-gowned in a fashion that had long since passed. Her preoccupation with the outlook was no less than the man's. But she expressed plainly enough an anxiety that found no sign in the other's cold eyes.

The silence between them had prolonged. Nothing seemed to distract them from their watch on the water. The trail dogs moving about on the quay, searching, snarling, sometimes even gambolling together, failed to claim their attention. So with the shuffling coming and going of an Indian servant, and the distant booming on the glacial hills. A profound weight of troubled thought seemed to hold them indifferent to their surroundings.

It was the girl who eventually broke the silence. And her voice was deep and pleasant, even though argument sounded in its tone.

"But, Noel, for all that something must have happened," she cried abruptly. "I mean something—serious. I can't think what. Legarde would have come back at once if he knew, if he had reason to think there was—trouble. Those are his definite orders. Well, he hasn't come back, and he's two weeks overdue, if Bucket had carried through his work successfully. It's no use. There's something wrong. Something seriously wrong."

She made an expressive little gesture with the delicate white hands in the lap of her summer frock. Then she looked round into the cold face of the man, and her expression was painfully urgent.

"Bucket's cool and clever. He's confident," she went on. "Maybe too confident. You know I've always feared Bucket's confidence. He looks on Spence as a fool. And he laughs at the Kenyons. I wonder. But even so I can't understand why there's no sign or word from Legarde. Remember, he'd a large cargo with him. If Bucket's met with accident, or—trouble—there's nothing to keep Legarde from returning—with his cargo. Spence doesn't even know of his existence. It must be accident to Legarde. The river's always to be reckoned with. Yes. That must be it. Accident. I'm sure that's all."

"Are you?"

The man's cold smile was on the woman. Her agitation had no other outward effect upon him. Just a cold smile, and a tone of biting irony which snapped with hardly suppressed irritation.

"You're not a bit logical, Marie," he said harshly. "You're not even consistent. You're playing the ostrich. You're scared to death Spence has pulled Bucket, and, at the same time trying to believe the river's drowned Legarde with the money. You make me tired. Face facts. Plain facts. And cut excuses and subterfuges right out. Legarde's two weeks overdue back here with something like twenty thousand dollars. Well? Legarde would have got along back if—he could. If things had happened to Bucket he'd have found out, and—got back with his own cargo. If Bucket had got through with the stuff Legarde would have been back on time. He hasn't got back. Why? Because he can't. Or——"

"You think they've got Bucket, and Legarde as well?"

The girl's cheeks had paled as she listened to the man's cold reasoning. Fear was clutching at her. It was the fear that had lived with her ever since she had discovered the real nature of the trade upon which the man to whom she had given herself soul and body was engaged. She had no scruple. Or if she had it was not that which inspired her terror. Her dread was for this queer cold creature whom she loved with all the passion of a fair young body. He had

demanded facts. He intended to face facts. And bitterly enough she had learned the fashion in which Noel Maddox faced facts.

"Maybe," he replied calmly. Then a mirthless laugh broke. "I don't just know what I think," he went on. "I'm going to learn the rights of things anyway. And I don't mean to lose a point in the game. There's always the other possibility. They may have double crossed us."

Marie shook her head. And there was no uncertainty in the movement.

"We've not been double crossed—unless the Indians have given us away," she declared firmly.

The man's gaze bored into hers.

"Why?"

"There was no need. Bucket's an equal partner. You've made half a million dollars. So has Bucket. Then why? What would another twenty thousand mean to him. He was to bring that back."

The man gestured impatiently.

"You forget Arden. Spence. The Kenyons. I'm under no illusion. They know. All they don't know is 'Where.' Arden knew that, and—I left him silent. It would have been better if I'd succeeded in silencing Kenyon and that girl. I'm not concerned about the Indians. They'll go on harvesting the lichen on the plateau till kingdom come, and they won't talk so long as I give them all the dope they want. As you say, Bucket has made half a million. Well? With the chance of getting pulled, why not a getaway with—half a million?"

"And Legarde?"

The man shrugged expressively.

"You know Bucket," he said. "Bucket's only concern was the money."

"You think he's killed Legarde to make—a getaway?"

"I don't think anything. I tell you, I'm going to know. And this time I'll make no mistake about the Kenyons and Spence."

Suddenly the cold lifelessness passed from the man's eyes. It was as though the slanting sun had found reflection in them. They were burning with a savage light.

"They're poor fools, the lot of them, if they think I'll stand for interference. No man gets two big chances in one lifetime. I've lived for the chance of this thing. Lived, and slaved for it. Do you think I'm standing for that outfit? I'm going down to find out why Legarde hasn't come through with the stuff. And when I come back there'll be no more interference from the folk on the Green Lake. Meanwhile you'll stop right here and keep the plant going. And if Bucket has met with accident," he added significantly, "well, I know he kept his roll buried around his shack. He didn't dare risk the banks. I'm going right off first thing to-morrow."

"Don't go, Noel!"

The girl sprang from her seat. She stood nearly as tall as the man himself, and her slim, graceful body moved close to him as her hand clutched at his arm.

"You mustn't! Oh, you mustn't, dear!" she cried, striving to compel him with the force of her appeal.

Maddox shook her off roughly.

"Cut that stuff right out, Marie," he said in frigid tones. "I haven't time for it. This is business. Plain business. And I'm going to see it through."

The rebuff had the effect of calming the girl, but not of silencing her.

"You want facts. To face facts," she cried, with a sound like a laugh. "Then listen. It's business. So I won't tell you I can't spare you. I won't tell you I don't want you to leave me. These wouldn't mean anything to you. But I'll tell you you're just crazy mad to want to kill up those folks, and set yourself right outside the law. You say they don't know—where. Then why—why in the name of all that's reasonable bring half the police at Athaba yearning for your scalp. Man, don't you see? Arden! Kenyon! And now a clean sweep. There won't be a place in the world you can be safe from them. You've netted half a million. Isn't

it enough for us both ? You can make a quick getaway, not by the river and Green Lake. We know better than that. Oh, Noel, don't do it ? I tell you it's not business. It's—it's—just craziness. Mad. Completely mad ! Listen to me. Will you ? Oh, Noel, I——"

" Don't be a fool ! "

The man broke in with a sweeping gesture as though brushing her out of his headlong way.

" Yes," he went on, with savage coldness. " I want facts and here they are. Plain, simple facts. Outside the law ? Lord, woman, we were outside the law from the moment Ottawa shouted fifty thousand dollars for our scalps. It makes no sort of difference getting these folk. When Ottawa offers fifty thousand dollars they'll see the law suits their play. I'm no crazy man. I want another year here, but I won't get it with those folks on my heels. Another year and we'll have all we need. Another year and we crash the plant, and burn the formula, and the world'll forget they ever knew alphaine. Another year and——"

The man started. He ceased speaking in the middle of his sentence, and turned an ear listening. The woman, too, was listening. But her attitude was a reflection of her man's.

There had been a sound, a sound foreign to the Nature sounds that went on all the time. It had been faint, almost indistinguishable. But the man's keen senses had collected it unerringly.

He stood without moving for some tense moments. Then he jerked his head at the Fort behind them.

" Best get inside, Marie," he ordered. " You can't ever tell."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAST CAMP

June was kneeling over the fire coaxing it into life. Her cheeks were distended as she blew the smoulder that seemed reluctant to respond to her efforts. It was a laborious, uncomfortable task which almost made her dizzy. At last a faint flicker. The girl straightened up and eyed it doubtfully. The stack of piled moss was very dry and she had hopes. After awhile, as the flame grew, her attention wandered.

She knelt there listening. Down below her lay the river, no longer the smooth, sluggish marsh river on which she had spent more than two weeks. It was a roughened water-race less than a hundred yards wide. It was a deep channel speeding between high banks. And the dank woods crowded down over it.

The girl gazed about her. The gloomy aisles of bare tree-trunks radiated in every direction except on the river front. But across it, on the far bank, they went on as if without end. The hush of the forest, the loneliness of it all, depressed her. In two years she had grown to know the open spaces of the treeless Barrens. This forest world was something new to her. Something new and oppressing. Then she was alone. And, from the far distance there came to her that dull, ominous murmur which carried with it so definite a threat.

It was curious how the absence of Jimmy Paton left her with such a feeling of loneliness. It made her angry with herself that it was so. Why should it ? She asked the question in a mood of self-scorning. And having done so re-

minded herself that she had planned to make this very journey without companionship of any sort.

At the memory of her original intention a shiver of panic passed through her. She tried to tell herself that she was foolish. That had she only set out alone it would have been different. Had she known no companionship at all then the present loneliness would never have been. It was quite absurd. She had travelled hundreds of miles alone in her light, single-paddled kyak, and had always revelled in the wide freedom of it.

Then her thoughts went back to the absent man. And she sighed as she admitted to herself how much his presence meant to her. No. It was not the forest. It was not the gloom about her, or the dull roar that came out of the far distance. It was the pleasant smiling personality of Jimmy she wanted.

Yes. That was it. He was so keen, so understanding. So ready to help, and so capable when difficulties arose. Of course, he wasn't the best river man in the world. On the whole she did not think him a good river man at all. But he was so big and strong, and smilingly reckless of all danger. That was the wonderful thing about Jimmy. She felt he would find something to smile at under the threat of instant death.

The drone in the distance went on like the murmur of unceasing thunder. It was insistent, unvarying. She knew what it was, and the sight of the ruffled water below her made her wonder if Jimmy were safe on the river alone. She was even regretful she had permitted him to go alone to explore the source of that threatening sound. She felt it would have been better for them to have gone together. Her experience would have countered his recklessness. With these rivers pouring out of a big hill country one could never be sure what snag——

Suppose any accident should happen! The boat! Jimmy!

June busied herself hastily. She piled dry pine cones and

moss on the now well-lit fire, and watched the smoke rise straight up above the surrounding trees. Then she stood up. And, passing down to the water's edge, she dipped her camp-kettle full. Presently she returned and prepared her cooking.

Jimmy would get back soon. She reminded herself of the fact with unnecessary emphasis. And when he came there must be an appetizing meal ready to comfort his big, hungry body. So she found herself very busy. But not so busy that it kept her from peering out over the water in a northerly direction where the dark forests seemed to come together to swallow up the racing waters.

June was anxious. She was more anxious than perhaps she would have admitted. But she knew that all her anxiety would completely vanish the moment Jimmy found himself sitting there on the other side of the fire, smiling at her through the reek of camp-fire smoke. She wanted Jimmy. Wanted him badly. And, somehow, if only he were with her now nothing else would matter in the least.

After a while the pleasant odour of the evening meal defeated the dank of the forest. It was a good meal, and appetizing. Some of Ma Gillian's bacon and beans, and some of the dried and compressed vegetables, which, at any other time, possessed no attraction for the girl. It was there stewing on the fire, and another kettle of water was heating for the tea.

June left these things to themselves. She moved over to where Jimmy's blankets were decorating some low scrub bushes. She collected them, and rolled them, and set them ready for his use. Then she passed into her tent. But it was only to reappear immediately. Her keen hearing had caught the first sound of a dipping paddle.

. . . .

It was a glad smile from the river bank that welcomed Jimmy Paton. And it was a cheery greeting that called to him across the water as he swung his boat head on to the heavy stream and nosed into the bank.

"You did that with the skill of a police scout," June cried. "I shan't ever be worried again."

Jimmy sprang from the boat, and scrambled up the steep bank with the mooring rope in his hand.

"Were you worried, June?" he smiled, with frankly glad eyes. "There's no need. I've learned the whole of the river business on to-day's trip. We've got to quit the river and make the rest on foot. Niagara's got shifted. Some crazy fool's picked it up and dumped it right ahead of us. You couldn't navigate the swirl of waters for a mile and more below it with a battleship. It's the biggest I've seen, and it scared me to death. I'm guessing there's no more river behind it. There's a small stream cuts into this river higher up. I didn't like the look of it. It's two miles up, just below the rapids. But I didn't explore it. No. I'd say it's a hill creek. This river ends at the falls with just a big sea behind 'em. That's how I make out."

The man's lightness did not lessen the gravity of his announcement. It suggested a complete checkmate to their plans. But June gave no sign. Her smile was full of a happiness that was proof against any disappointment his report contained. She nodded.

"I guessed it was a big fall," she said. "We'll have to portage. Say, food's fixed. Come along up and get rested."

The manner of it was so intimate, so possessive. The big youth experienced a thrill of delight that left him completely forgetful of the battle he had fought out that day with the river.

"I'll just lift her out," he said, and turned back to the boat.

But again their intimacy made itself felt. June moved down to his side. And together they lifted the sturdy craft from the water.

. . . . .

They had eaten their meal and the remains of it had been laid aside. The pots remained uncleaned. But that would

be work for the morning. Jimmy was not sitting beyond the fire as June had visualized. They were sitting side by side, gazing out over the river watching the night mists which were now rapidly deepening.

Jimmy was smoking with infinite content. He had come through a tremendous struggle with a turbulent river. There had been times that day, as he laboured to approach the falls, when he could not tell from one moment to another whether he would escape the disaster which seemed to threaten him on every hand. He had set out to explore. And in his reckless inexperience he had done it so completely that he now fully appreciated the miracle which had brought him safely back to camp and to June. He was so wearily content that he had no other desire than to squat over the fire revelling in the joy of the girl's proximity.

June's feelings were no less happy. But she wanted to know. She wanted to plan. She wanted to hear the deep voice that had come to mean so much to her.

"You think it's the end, Jimmy? Those falls?" she asked, after listening to a more detailed account of the man's adventures. "But we can't be really sure till we've portaged beyond them. There's falls on most big rivers, you know."

Jimmy grinned lazily.

"I got a big view of 'em," he said. "Bigger than I'd any right to—from below. The whole country's changed two miles up. It's gone right up like a rocket. Those falls are six hundred feet if they're an inch. They're a half-mile across, too. Well, I've yet to find a mountain stream that wide. Besides, back of the falls are hills in the distance going right up to the sky. It looks like a darn big lake is dumping its overflow into this river. And if that's so——"

He broke off, and stared thoughtfully into the fire.

"If you're right, Jimmy, it means not only the end of the river. It means the end of—our journey," June said sombrely. "It's a queer thing, but the old folks who traded these outlands most always built on lake shores when they could. Suppose we make a portage and get a look beyond.

Maybe it's there. Somewhere on the—. You know I've been thinking of those neches we saw yesterday. It's a pity neither of us can speak their queer jargon. If we could have understood them it might have saved us a lot. The first one we saw wasn't informative. But that boy, two miles back, seemed as though he were scared for us. I'm almost sure of it. He was trying to make us understand some danger. Then neither of them had boats."

"I'd forgotten that," Jimmy said quickly. Then his grin dawned afresh, "I don't think I noticed, anyway. What d'you make out?"

"Why, they both live around," June returned promptly. "Or they're on a land trail. If they live around——"

June broke off significantly and Jimmy nodded.

"Of course. I didn't get that either."

They remained silent for a while gazing into the heart of the fire, while the darkness about them deepened.

"I'm glad you got through all right," June said awkwardly, without looking round at her companion. "You know it was foolish me letting you go alone. I was worried the moment you got out of sight round the bend. If uncle had been here he'd have told me the fool thing we were doing."

"If the boat got smashed you were marooned here without a hope," Jimmy said seriously. "I thought of that."

"Did you?" The slant of an eye took in the man's bare arms that were locked about his knees. June's tone was very soft.

Jimmy released his knees and passed a hand back over his forehead.

"Yes," he said. "And it got me scared so I was—careful." June started to chuckle.

"Oh, Jimmy," she laughed. "You were careful so I shouldn't get marooned hundreds of miles from home? How careful?"

"Why, I quit before I got where the canoe couldn't live."

June's amusement was almost hysterical.

"That's rather swell of you," she said softly. Then slyly: "You must have been badly scared."

Jimmy turned. His eyes searched the smiling face. Then he laughed aloud and June laughed with him.

"You know, June, I'm all sorts of a fool on the river," he said, with sudden seriousness. "But I did think—just that. And when I thought it I felt like a school kid making his first truant. Every time the water shipped over the side I felt like handing up a prayer I couldn't remember. The standing rocks looked like just so many armed toughs waiting to do me up. And the only reason I didn't hit right back without going farther was that it didn't look as safe as crawling up higher where there weren't so many rocks. I was like an addled egg worrying because I couldn't make a chicken. Then it got worse. But I didn't have to turn back. A bad eddy swirled me round and washed me into a deep channel that wouldn't let me go. When I woke up I was heading back here to—you."

June drew a deep breath. Her gaze was on the fire as though nothing else in the world had interest for her. The droning of the far off falls was like the resentful growl of some predatory creature baulked of its legitimate prey. She was torn by conflicting feelings. She wanted the man beside her to go on talking, while she feared to hear what he would say next. But over all, above everything else, was her gladness that his big body was sprawled there beside her.

Jimmy was lounging over on his side. He was facing the girl. But he was not looking at her. A mad rush of longing was surging through him. He was striving for control and knew it was beyond him.

"Juny!"

"Yes, Jimmy."

The man sat up. One of the girl's hands was on the ground supporting her as she sat with her feet tucked under her. A big, warm hand closed over it.

"I never knew the thought of a girl could ever set a man scared," Jimmy said, in a quiet tone that was not quite

steady. Then he added whimsically. "I never before had the chance to know. I saw you sitting around here alone. Waiting, waiting for that boat. And I sort of saw you without food, alone, without hope. And I think I went stark crazy."

The big hand closed about the soft brown fingers, and they remained held, offering no resistance.

"Why?" The man's voice was deep and thrilling. "Do you know why?"

June's study of the comforting fire was profound. The man's big body came closer. June knew. But she dared not look round or give a sign. Another hand moved and touched her. It slid itself about her unresisting body. The girl shivered at the touch, and her whole body thrilled responsively.

"I want you, Juny. I just love the ground you're—you're sitting on. I——"

The girl was in his arms, and her upturned face was to his. And, in delirious moments, June knew that the world held no other man.

. . . . .

"Jimmy!"

June's body stiffened in the man's arms. Her head had lifted with a startled movement. Her face was turned from his. She was peering into the misty twilight where the forest encountered the fall to the river.

"Listen!"

Suddenly the great arms fell from about the rigid body. Jimmy was on his feet with the leap of a panther. He crossed the fire in a stride, and passed on to the point June had indicated. There was the sound of hurrying footsteps crushing dead pine cones as they came. There was nothing secret, or stealthy in the sound. They were just hurrying through the forest. And their owner was clearly guided by the glimmer of the camp-fire.

Presently a figure emerged from within the trees. And in

a moment the sound of Jimmy's greeting came back to the startled girl.

"Lenoir! By all the miracles!"

. . . . .

"Thank God, I've found you both," the missionary cried, with profound relief.

The three figures were sitting round the amply replenished fire. Jimmy had returned to his place beside June. That place he now felt to be his by right. June and he were both gazing at the eager, earnest face beyond the fire.

Lenoir had confounded all their previous ideas of him. This beginner, this mission-trained student, in a few brief weeks had achieved all that Arden had given his old, understanding life for. More—much more than June and her uncle had done in years. In his own confident, reckless fashion, aided by his Indians, he had arrived at the place they all three now believed was to yield up the secret of these Barren Lands.

Jimmy was somehow without rejoicing. June just looked, and waited, and her pretty eyes told none of the precious secret that lay behind them. One great thing stood out in her mind, however. Lenoir's coming meant something of corroboration of that belief of which she had hinted to her Jimmy.

The missionary's whole air was one of satisfaction and relief. Even of triumph. His eyes were shining in the firelight. And his speech came almost in a torrent.

"It's been a terrible journey," he said. "The Indians are wonderful, wonderful. Whatever we may think of them lazing in their settlements, set them on a trail and we white folk are babes beside them. They brought me as the birds fly. And it's been hills, and valleys, and muskeg, and rivers, all the way. I'm afraid I had to deceive them to induce them to bring me here. I promised them all they wanted of the—drug. It was sinful. It was immoral. But I was determined."

The thrust of the man's jaw made his final assertion unnecessary.

"Fort Lindsay is just up above the big falls. It's on the shore of a great mountain lake, many miles in extent. I'd say it's five miles from here over land, and longer by this river. I haven't been right up to it yet. But Louis and the neches have scouted. Louis says the Fort's occupied. He saw smoke rising from its roof, and boats on the lake. He says it's right on the shore, and behind it is a high, steaming plateau lost in fog. The Indians told him that's where they work. That's where they gather the awful stuff from which the man Maddox distils his ghastly poison."

He paused. His eyes were angrily snapping as he contemplated the demoniac work of that ruthless man.

"Directly I knew we'd arrived, and I was pursuing no chimera, I held counsel with Louis," he went on. "You see, the Indians were useless except for scouting and fighting. We'd come so far, under such difficult circumstances, I couldn't take any risk of failure of our ultimate purpose. So I decided on camp. A hidden camp, while Louis and one or two Indians scouted and learned all they could, Louis being a half-breed and cleverer even at that sort of thing than the Indians."

He gestured back at the river.

"I didn't know of the falls then," he said earnestly. "I got a vision of you two making along and coming out on the lake in full view of the Fort." His expressive hands went up. "You'd simply have been at his mercy. And we know what that would mean. You'd never have lived to get away. Besides, I wanted you badly, Doctor. I wanted your advice and help before taking action. So I put a watch on this river to intercept you. I stationed two men at different points."

Again his hands bestirred in a movement of illustration.

"I was foolish, no doubt. I forgot they couldn't speak our tongue. And I forgot you couldn't speak theirs. However, they served some purpose. They saw you, and when

you camped here they saw your fire and came back to me. Then they led me here. They're way back in that forest. When I saw the light of your fire I came on alone. And I thank God for having found you. Miss June, Doctor, with His help we can now checkmate the rascal and destroy his wickedness for ever."

The expression of the missionary's face was full of the man's exalted spirit, which, in its faith, had dared so greatly. Jimmy removed his pipe and his eyes were shining.

"You've short-circuited the whole thing, Padre," he said unreservedly. He grinned. "I just don't know how you've done it. The police?" He gestured. "Well, what's the next move?"

The missionary's smile was good to see. But he shook his head.

"That's why I want you, Doctor. You and Miss June." He glanced back at the river. Then at the camp generally. Then he leant forward. "This river's no use to you now. The falls. They're terrific. Cache your boat and come back to my camp. We can approach the Fort on the western side of the lake. There's no other approach. There's a way down through the hills on to the plateau, and then down to the Fort. That's the way they all use, Indians, and this Maddox. Then the drug passes down this river to Bucket. Or—it used to. We can complete our plans and attack that way."

Jimmy sat lost in thought. And it was June who replied.

"Spence. And Uncle Andy," she said. "Did you leave any word behind?"

The missionary's smile was appreciative.

"Oh, yes, Miss June," he said readily. "I wrote a long letter, telling all I knew, and what I was doing. I was in a difficulty. I couldn't give details of the direction I was taking except the general fact that it was to the hill country to the north-east. I told them all I could, though. And I asked them to follow up. But I haven't much hope. It

was a terrible journey. And without the Indians I don't think I could ever make it back."

The man was full of concern. June smiled.

"Don't worry, Mr Lenoir. Spence and Uncle will trail you. You don't know Spence. And my uncle knows these Barrens like—like an Indian."

"You think that, Miss June?" The delight of the churchman was an expression of child-like faith. "Oh, I hope so. I do hope so. And I pray he may come soon. Because," he added, with a head-shake of misgiving, "I fear we shall need all help possible. I don't want to make——"

"Stick 'em right up! The lot o' you!"

The missionary sat there petrified into silence. Jimmy looked up with a violent start. June uttered an inarticulate cry and sat staring.

It was a tall white man, a powerful creature whose eyes shone mockingly in the firelight. And in the dim uncertainty the lower part of his face looked to be obscured either by beard or some sort of covering. Two guns were levelled, heavy bored automatics of unusual type. And, curiously enough, in that moment of crisis, the make of them rather than their threat held Jimmy Paton fascinated. He sat staring at them instead of obeying the harsh-flung order.

Then, as the warning snapped again in the assailant's fiercest tones, he became aware that the missionary's hands had been hastily raised above his head.

A moment later his own were thrust up, and his eyes were grinning mechanically. Then came a rush of feet. He was seized from behind and a physical battle against odds began.

. . . . .

There was movement down at the water's edge, unhurried and voiceless. A number of Indian figures were silently obeying the commands of a white leader. They were loading three canoes. And the burden of each vessel was a cruelly bound human body.

In a few moments each boat was manned by its pilot. And the largest of the three contained the white commander of the raiders as well. The boats were cast off, and slid out into the uneasy stream. But they did not swing to it. The men at the paddles thrust deeply, and nosed them slowly up against the stream in the direction of the falls.

And so June, and Jimmy, and the reckless student missionary came to old Fort Lindsay.

CHAPTER XXX

PRISONERS

Jimmy stirred. His big body rolled over. And as it did so the agony of it was almost unendurable. For a while he lay quite still, face downwards on some sort of mattress that reeked foully in his nostrils. Suddenly a sensation of suffocation took hold of him. He was choking and gasping for breath. A queer panic set him struggling violently. And in a moment he was back in his original position with his aching arms, bound almost to laceration, crushed under the weight of his body.

Now, he lay still. Quite still. He tried to think clearly. And with wide eyes sought to penetrate the inky blackness enveloping him. Where was he? How had he come to be lying there on a stinking mattress in pitch darkness. Why was he enduring such pain? Why were his arms held crushed under him? And why were his legs fast and immovable?

But for some reason his brain seemed paralyzed, and refused to function. His head ached, too. God! How it ached! A throbbing, burning agony at the back of his head nearly drove him mad. In a frenzy he strove to release his hands from under him.

Perhaps it was the effort, perhaps the pain he endured through his body as a result of his struggles helped to ease that of his head. His brain began to clear, and recollection to return. He became still again. And, with the abandonment of all movement, the sledge-hammer beat of his throbbing head once more became shattering. The flash of memory that had come to him was of a pair of hands raised

above the missionary's head, and of the vision of two threatening guns.

For some time there was nothing further. Then slowly, very slowly, it all came back.

Yes. Now he remembered. The attack on the camp. Noel Maddox. His queer, long-barrelled automatics. Then he, Jimmy, had been seized. He had fought. It seemed to him he must have fought for hours. June! He remembered he had seen her in the hands of two Indians. And he had tried to reach her. The missionary. He, too, had been struggling with some Indians. Then the whole scene had suddenly been wiped out as though it were the passing of a dream.

That must be it. Somebody, probably one of the Indians, had beaten him over the head with a club. It felt like it. It would account for it all. Then what had happened?

No. He could remember nothing further. The rest was a hopeless blank. He could only surmise, which, after all, was useless. The stern fact was that he was a prisoner, bound hand and foot. And the dank atmosphere about him warned him that he was probably in some disused cell in the Fort which had been their objective. In spite of the pain and discomfort, and the chagrin of it all, his sense of humour would not be denied.

Though his mind was a blank as to subsequent actual happenings the general position was slowly unrolling before him. Maddox must have known their movements, their purpose. He must have been biding his time. And then, with consummate skill, the moment he had them all together, and wholly unsuspecting, he had descended upon them and launched his attack. Now he fully realized the utter folly of which they had been guilty.

Turning things over in his mind a sudden horror swept in on him, filling him with loathing and despair. He suddenly remembered Mervyn Arden and the final terror that came to him. And for some moments he lay there appalled. He was not thinking of himself. It was of June!

A shudder passed through his aching body. June! Little June! That awful disease! The loathsome pustules! He was gazing on a revolting picture of her sweet face and fair body pockmarked with the ghastly affliction. It was a dreadful vision.

But just as suddenly as it had come that ugly thing was swept out of his mind. A sound. It was muffled but unmistakable. It was the groan of a human voice that came from somewhere near. And it was something for which he kn w he had not been responsible.

He raised his aching head and called softly.

"June!"

The echo of his voice came back to him. He waited. Then he called again, and presently the groan was repeated.

This time it was louder and more distinct. Its tone, its quality was definite. The hope that June was there near him was dashed. It was the sound of a man's voice. And it was near, and somewhere to his left.

"Padre!"

Reply was instant and louder, but still unintelligible. But it told Jimmy all he wanted to know. It was like the missionary striving to speak through some stifling pressure.

Alof Lenoir was a prisoner with him, and he was probably gagged. Jimmy wondered. Why should he have been gagged while his own mouth had been left free? Then he remembered that undoubtedly he had been unconscious. Perhaps the sturdy fighting spirit of the missionary had made the gag a necessity.

It all seemed hopeless, and dispiriting, and Jimmy lay back thinking hard. The pain in his head had certainly lessened, but that was his only consolation. Nevertheless it was something for which to be thankful, for, in his emergency, it allowed his brain to become more than a hundred per cent alert.

What could he do? What must he do? Was there anything possible that could help them?

The position looked pretty grim. Search as he would,

Jimmy could find nothing that offered any sort of hope. Every wrestle with his bonds only invoked excruciating pain and left him exhausted. And so long as he was bound he knew he was at the complete mercy of his captors. So he closed his eyes in the vain hope of easing the pain he was enduring. But it was quite useless. And when he reopened them he realized a faint glimmer of grey light where before all had been inky black.

The change was very slight but quite definite. There was no doubt about it. A soft grey twilight was growing. Daylight! And the discovery stirred him to renewed hope.

Regardless of all pain he now craned about to discover where the light was admitted. And it was only after an almost acrobatic feat he was able to ascertain its source. Behind his head was a row of vertical narrow slits in the wall. They were not windows. Just slits that reminded him of gun emplacements. His discovery removed all doubt as to the identity of his prison. It must clearly be—Fort Lindsay.

"It's getting daylight," he called softly. "There's not much doubt Maddox has got us. When it gets lighter maybe we'll find a way of—doing something."

The only reply Jimmy received was the groan he anticipated. But it did him good to talk. It did him good to think the utter darkness was passing. And though he was without an idea of what could be done, he felt better. Much better.

The daylight broadened rapidly. Soon Jimmy found things taking shape about him. He ascertained that his stinking palliasse was narrow, that it was on a stone-flagged floor littered with growing fungus. And that it was laid against a stone wall which contained a doorway just beyond his feet. There was another door. But that was in the far cross wall. He could see that it was heavy, and studded, and he fancied he could make out the square of a great old iron lock.

He peered across the floor in search of the missionary. As

he anticipated, the prone figure was against the opposite wall stretched out on a palliasse similar to his own. It was the sight of that bound, helpless figure that set his nimble mind leaping.

But he uttered no sound. He made no movement. He lay there gazing, measuring, calculating, studying.

After a while he bestirred. His body heaved, and he rolled himself over. It was a helpless movement and quite uncontrolled. And as he rolled himself clear of his palliasse his aching head bumped viciously on the damp stone floor. The task he had set himself was to reach the bound missionary by the ridiculous process of rolling his way across to him.

It was painful, laborious work. His main concentration was to keep his defenceless head off the stones, and save his hands, which were bound behind him from the crushing weight of his body each time he found himself on his back. But in spite of the pain of it, in spite of the oozing fungus that increased his difficulties, in spite of the apparent uselessness of the effort of it all, he accomplished the journey. In a few minutes he was beside the missionary's palliasse. And his head was raised and he was searching to discover the knots that secured the churchman's bonds.

He was breathing hard with the strain of holding himself in position. And what he beheld puzzled and interested him. In some ways Alof Lenoir had been better treated than he. For one thing the man's arms and hands were merely secured to his sides. Then he was lashed from head to foot rather like the binding of a mummy. But he could see at a glance he was suffering none of the pain and discomfort to which he had been put. True he was gagged. But here again, beyond the discomfort of breathing, it was a muzzle rather than a stifling thing wedged into his mouth.

"Can you roll over to the wall?" Jimmy asked.

For answer the mummy-lashed body heaved and strained. But there was no result. It was evident the missionary's bonds made the task impossible.

"Right. Never mind. Just lie quite still."

Jimmy's mind was set. There was no alternative. The missionary could give him no assistance. By a superhuman effort he lifted his own chest from the floor. He wriggled forward on his belly till he lay poised over the bound figure. He sought out one rawhide thong and considered it. Then his face came down, and his sharp, strong teeth gripped it and chewed.

. . . . .

Freed of their bonds the two men were resting on the missionary's palliasse.

It had been a long and wearisome business. But Jimmy pursued it with an intensity of resolve that refused defeat. He had literally gnawed his way through Lenoir's bonds till the man's hands were released. After that the rest had been easy. Once the missionary had relieved himself of his gag, and the lashings of his ankles, he had quickly performed the same office for his rescuer. And now they were resting, easing their cramped muscles, and silently enduring the aftermath of bondage.

It was Jimmy who eventually broke the silence.

"Just what happened, Padre, after they must have knocked me out?" he asked, working his powerful wrists to limber them.

The missionary felt his lower jaw like a man expecting to find it dislocated.

"It was just awful, Doctor," he said, with a helpless, horrified gesture. "When I saw you go down I quit. I don't know. I just had to. It was Miss June that decided me. I thought you were killed. I guessed they'd kill me if I went on struggling. Then Miss June would be without help of any sort. I'd be no use dead. I might be of use to her alive, though I didn't quite know how. So I quit. I'd seen they weren't handling her too roughly. Maddox himself fixed her. And he seemed kind of inclined to be merciful. I thought they'd treat me easily—at first anyway. But," he shook his head lugubriously, "you see, I was a man. It was

different. They didn't quit at binding me. They stuffed that hateful thing over my mouth. It was a most unhappy experience, I assure you."

Jimmy grinned from sheer habit.

"They didn't make much of a job of it," he said. "Why, I believe if you'd tried hard you could have talked through it. Or hollered, or something. The rest was all right, only you didn't have to lie on your own hands like they made me. You certainly got all the luck."

The missionary smiled faintly.

"I certainly had the luck of your being imprisoned here. Who else would have thought of gnawing through rawhide bonds?" Lenoir sighed his relief and thankfulness. "What do you think he'll do with us? When do you think he'll come?"

Jimmy stared at the iron bolted door.

"I'm waiting for him to show up with—a hyperdermic syringe," he muttered.

"A hyp—!" The missionary stared aghast.

"Yes. You need to remember Arden," Jimmy broke in. "Mervyn Arden."

Jimmy rose from the palliasse. He moved gingerly, setting one foot before the other, and testing out each aching limb as he advanced it.

"You mean the—drug?"

In the half daylight of the place Lenoir's face was a study in revolting.

Jimmy rubbed his legs tenderly.

"There isn't a reason in the world to hope we'll fare better than Mervyn Arden did," he said harshly. "But I don't care a curse for you or myself. If we get time to limber up before they come, I'll put up a hell of a scrap and make them shoot us down rather than get the drug. It's June I'm thinking of. June! My God! If they stab their filthy poison into her! Think of it!"

Jimmy's hands went up and his great fists were clenched. He shook them impotently.

"I tell you, when they come I'll fight," he cried fiercely. "And if it's Maddox, I'll break his neck before he gets me. June! Little June!"

The missionary gazed at the big creature as though fascinated. In eager admiration his eyes followed the great body as it passed up and down the narrow limits of their cell. And presently he spoke.

"But he wouldn't touch Miss June—that way," he argued. "She's a girl. A beautiful girl, and he's—a man. I can't believe there could be such wanton cruelty in any human heart."

"Is it a human heart?" Jimmy had ceased pacing, and stood glaring down on the man whose faith endured even under circumstances that might well have destroyed all belief in human goodness. "He did it to Mervyn Arden. He's been the curse of the Indians for years. He's sending out this horrible stuff for a world of foolish men—and women. Man, he'd do it to anybody. Don't talk that stuff to me, Padre. Maybe your Christian faith is enough for you. I haven't time for it. When he comes here I'm going to do the only thing. Fight! And I'll fight to kill, whatever happens. You get that? I don't care what you do. You can sit around, and pray, or any old thing. If there's a ghost of a chance, if there isn't, even, I'm going to do anything I know to save that helpless kid. I'll wait by that doorway. And I'll——"

Jimmy broke off with a startled ejaculation. The missionary had staggered to his feet. They were standing together gazing at the stone loopholes beyond which the daylight was shining. It was a sound. The crack of a rifle. And it came, or seemed to come from somewhere beyond those slits that looked out over a lake.

"Louis!"

The missionary's cry was exultant. A hand gripped about Jimmy's great forearm and clung to it.

"Listen!"

They stood without moving. Their ears were straining.

Again came the sound of firing. Then Lenoir suddenly released his hold on the other, and calmly reseated himself on his palliasse. He gazed up at the doctor, and a triumphant smile shone in his eyes.

"Louis, with my outfit!" he cried ecstatically. "He must have waited. And when I didn't return with you and Miss June he must have gone to look for us. I knew I could trust him. My prayers have been answered."

CHAPTER XXXI

RIGOR-MORTIS

How long the assault on their prison lasted Jimmy Paton had neither time nor inclination to consider. From the moment he and the troubled missionary had heard the first shot fired, until the prison door was first battered, and at length flung open, and two free men gazed once more on the broad smiling light of day, had seemed an eternity. It had been an interminable period of alternating hope and disappointment. That wearing mental strain which inevitably distorts all sense of time, and completely discounts ultimate triumph.

Jimmy had an inborn dislike of halfbreeds. It was almost detestation. It was that curious human revulsion against all things which outrage the laws of Nature. Of the big half-breed, Louis Batteau, he had openly expressed his disapproval. But when that dark-skinned, harsh-visaged, unnatural product appeared in the open doorway of his prison, and greeted his boss with his brutish, self-satisfied grin, he was in a mood to welcome him with the frank gladness and gratitude which he might have extended to some well loved friend.

Nor were his feelings due to any selfish rejoicing that his own period of adversity was at an end. One thought alone was in his mind. June! The contemplation of her possible sufferings had well-nigh demented him. She had become his whole world. And hurt to her, with him denied his right to succour, left him with a feeling that his whole world had come tumbling about his head in ruins.

So, when he glimpsed the girl's happily smiling eyes peering into his prison, seeking him, from behind the big body of the half-breed, nothing else mattered. She was safe, released. And he was happily shocked out of his prejudice against the man who had done his loyal best. Louis Batteau's first thought had been to succour the white girl!

That glorious reunion became a sort of landmark which Jimmy felt he might well carry with him to the end of his days.

Paramount, certainly, was his reunion with the girl he loved. But behind it lay the certainty now of ultimate triumph in the purpose upon which they were all engaged.

They were unforgettable moments, unforgettable sights. Louis Batteau's war-grimed, grinning face. June's nearly hysterical delight in his safety. And then the missionary, in his holy satisfaction looking ready to drop on his sturdy knees and offer up thanksgiving.

The only unmoved creatures who witnessed the scene were the two or three Indians, leaning on their store rifles, who had helped the half-breed beat down the door of the cell.

But no time was wasted. There were a few thankful expressions, and June's hand managed to slip itself into the palm of the man who she believed had so nearly been snatched from her. Then Jimmy took command.

He spoke to Louis Batteau in a way that allowed of no denial.

"There's a deal to do," he said. "This Maddox. Did you get him? Or is he——"

The half-breed's grin was illuminating. It was unholy. He jerked his head indicating the landing outside.

"You can get a look at him. His missis, too. He's through."

Jimmy studied the man's face. There was something in its expression that revolted him. It was the satisfaction of a natural killer. He heard June catch her breath as the man mentioned Maddox's woman.

"We'll get out of here now," Jimmy replied coldly. "It looks like mid-day. I want all your story for the police. Where?"

The half-breed's grin faded out. His dark eyes were hidden for a moment.

"The dope," he protested. "Ther's a hell of a bunch of machines. Ther's——"

He flashed a glance at the missionary as though seeking guidance. But Jimmy was adamant.

"That's all right," he said incisively. "If he's outside the rest can wait. I want all you can tell me. Let's get out of this."

Louis reluctantly yielded.

"There's the store," he said in a grudging tone. And again he jerked his head.

. . . . .

It was an eager gathering in the store. The place was packed, from its stone floor to the aged rafters that supported the flat stone roof, with every kind of Indian trade. It included an extraordinarily liberal stock of arms and ammunition. Jimmy pointed at the latter.

"We don't need to guess where Bucket got the trade that helped to keep him his Indians," he said.

June was gazing at some shelves.

"Look," she cried. "Store blankets. The squaws have got that kind at the settlement."

The missionary was gazing about him with an absorbed look of silent wonder. Louis alone seemed to have no interest. He moved to where a big unopened bale of stuff was lying in a darkened corner, and took up his position on it. He sat watching the others. And presently he took a damaged cigarette from the remains of a packet and lit it.

Jimmy surveyed the amazing wealth of stores, and wondered at the organization that could have conveyed them to so remote a post. Then he turned on the half-breed.

"Tell us," he said, shortly.

His manner was an order. And, by the tone of it, it seemed as if all recollection of the loyal work this big ruffian had done had been forgotten. He sat himself on a packing case with June beside him.

Without preamble Louis Batteau began the barest outline of his single-handed campaign. The man was as short and grudging of detail as he could well be. And all through it he contrived to convey his reluctance. Jimmy recognized the manner and sought to give it the best interpretation. After all the man was telling of his own prowess. But somehow that interpretation did not seem to fit the half-breed.

"I acted the way you said, boss," Louis deferred, addressing the missionary who was leaning against a sort of rough counter. "When you got out after these folk, why I just got after the Fort again. I figured I must get a close look around. And that act near cost us the game."

He inhaled his cigarette.

"I made these woods an' hit the muskeg. An' only just got out with my life. It was then I think he got wise—Maddox. He couldn't see me. But I guess he heard. Anyways, he an' his woman were on the landing. I could have dropped 'em both. I'd have been glad to. But I was mired. The place was dead quiet. Maybe I made a racket. I don't know. Anyway I see him looking square out my way—startled. The woman, too. I'd figgered on swimming to the boats. But I didn't swim. I nearly drowned in muck."

He sucked his cigarette, and then flung it on the stones.

"I got back to camp an' thought hard. I'd that plateau, with its fog, in mind. I reckoned ther' should be a way of making it. So ther' was. I located it on the second jump. Hit a trail. A trail like cattle punch out for themselves, or —Indians. It took me round west of the lake. It was well beaten. And, I guess, wher' it led I could make, too. It was the hills back of this Fort. A bit of a split between two. It passed right through, an' dumped me into that mist."

He lit another cigarette and breathed heavily.

" It wasn't easy after that," he went on, with his black eyes hidden. " But I made it along. An' after a big worry I hit the edge of the plateau an' looked down. I got a start right away. I was lookin' down on the Fort and landing. An' they were making an outfit of three boats ready. Him, an' his woman, an' a bunch of neches." He nodded knowingly. " I reckoned then he'd surely heard me, and was dead wise to things. What was he after ? I didn't get it clear then. I'm wiser now. I just watched them beat up to the north end of the lake and was puzzled. You see, the big falls we reckoned was the start of the river these folks were on are at the south of the lake."

" Yes. I've had a look at them," put in Jimmy drily.

" Jest so," the man agreed through a cloud of smoke. " Well, ther' must be another stream from the north end, an' it cuts into that river way back somewhere. A creek you can make with a kyak without wrecking. Anyway, I see them pull out. An' it was him, our guy, all right. And after that I made back to camp to wait for you folks."

He paused.

" You didn't get along," he went on at last. " But those boys you had with you did, boss. And they handed out their dope in a mighty scare. You'd been rounded up, the three of you. By that feller Maddox with his three boats."

" It wasn't Noel Maddox."

Every eye was on June as she spoke. Alof Lenoir was searching her face with mild wonder. The half-breed flashed a keen look and went on smoking. Jimmy waited for June to go on.

" He'd a beard or something about the lower part of his face," June said quickly. " But it made no difference. I'd know him anywhere. I've known him all my life. It wasn't he. He was too big, for one thing. Then his eyes weren't the right colour. I saw them in the firelight. They were dark."

"The firelight plays tricks," the missionary hazarded gently.

"It wasn't he," June persisted. "I'm—certain."

"Who could it have been then, Missie."

June felt herself shrink from the word "Missie" in the half-breed's oily, sceptical tones. Then she saw his heavy shoulders lift in a shrug which she resented as contemptuous.

"He's lyin' right ther' out on the landin' with his missis," Louis grinned. "It'll be easy. He pulled out with a bunch, an' three boats. He got back with his outfit an' three boats, an'—you folk."

Jimmy saved the girl further discussion.

"That'll do later," he said sharply.

Then he compelled the half-breed with eyes unusually unsmiling and waited for him to go on.

"Well, when I got that word I figgered it was up to me," Louis began again grimly. "I made ready an' set out for the plateau with our whole outfit, an' every weapon, an' all the ammunition we could pack. We made the lip of the plateau soaked in mist, an' waited the first daylight. Then we just dropped right down on the Fort and handed Maddox the big surprise. We got 'em good," he said, with his first display of real pleasure. "We'd surrounded the place and waited. I was ther', at the front, on the landing. We never made a sound. Maddox came out. I had him covered, cached where he didn't know. I waited for his woman. She came, full of a big worry to argufy him. I got 'em both, an' the fight began."

He threw away his cigarette with a vicious gesture.

"Oh, they put up a swell scrap, the rest," he leered. "But they were neches, an' a couple of Chinese, a bunch without a head. It wasn't an' open shooting match by a lot. They just held this Fort, and scrapped from positions. We held to cover. We hadn't a thing to lose. They were held, and knew it. I guess we wittled 'em. Oh, we wittled 'em all right. We got 'em every time they showed an eyelid. And they're dead. The lot. Fifteen of 'em. Dead as

mutton. We can just get right after the dope, an' the machines for fixing it. I tell you this dump's one swell making place."

. . . . .

The old stone quayside was bathed in misty mountain sunshine, and its glow was much greater than its warmth. A drift of air was coming down off the glaciers with a chill that was biting.

As they moved out from the store Jimmy took in the whole scene in one swift, comprehensive glance. He saw the swirl of mist steaming about the edge of the plateau which Louis had told about. He saw the rippling surface of the great lake which looked to fill a monstrous basin extending for miles away to the north. He listened to the droning thunder of the falls he had seen from below and which had come so near to wrecking him. He saw the cold grey gleam of the aged glaciers which poured their life-blood into the great reservoir below. It was a scene to awe, to inspire. But at the moment his interest was elsewhere.

He counted four dead bodies of Indians littering the quay. He saw the still forms of several trail dogs strewn about as though slain for pastime. Then his gaze came to rest at the head of the rough stone steps which went down to the boat moorings. It was a little pile of dead humanity that instantly proclaimed its pitiful story.

Louis Batteau led the way. He approached the steps with no shrinking. The man's ruthless nature was impervious to any human pity. And the gleam of his intelligent eyes shone with satisfaction.

June was at Jimmy's side immediately behind him. There was a queer strained look in her eyes. Her pretty colouring had suffered. She was mutely preparing a defence against natural womanly feelings. Jimmy was grimly silent as he strode beside her. And the churchman brought up the rear wrapt in thoughts that found no vocal expression.

The cold white face of the man was staring up at the

steely blue of the cloudless sky. His body was lying awry, with his knees drawn up awkwardly. The woman looked to have been on her knees beside him when the life was finally shot out of her. She was lying face downwards across her man's body and her arms were curiously crumpled under her. They were at the very brink of the steps where a rusted iron stanchion stood. And one of the man's arms was even hanging out over the top step.

They ranged themselves about the dead couple and stood gazing down upon them. Whatever emotion the sight evoked there was no articulate expression of it. But the half-breed's eyes shone as he watched the white faces about him.

It was he who broke the impressive silence.

"Well, Missie? Is that your Maddox?" he asked with an ugly grin of confidence.

June inclined her head. Somehow she could not bring herself to verbal reply. Louis Batteau sickened her. Her recognition had been instant. She had played with Noel Maddox in those days of childhood which seemed now to be ages and ages ago.

Jimmy saw the nod of affirmation. But he had not needed it. He, too, knew that Noel Maddox was lying there dead before them. His recollection of the man had been slight enough, almost hazy. But confronted with him his recognition was beyond question. He turned on Louis Batteau.

"Miss June's right, though," he said firmly. "That's not the man who held us up. My impression was of a bigger man, too. I know what Mr Lenoir said is true enough. There was only the firelight. And it's easy to get a wrong impression in a moment of shock." He shook his head. "Was there another man around? Another white man you—didn't get?"

Louis eyed the cold, white face on the ground. And his expression contained its first look of uncertainty. Yet he shook his head with the slow movement of complete conviction.

"We fought 'em for six hours or more," he said. "We got 'em one by one where they fired. An' all that time we never see a sign. No. Ther' wasn't any other white man. Besides," he gestured impatiently, "that's the boy who set out for the north of the lake with his bunch of neches and —three boats. It was three boats toted you folks in. Missie June and the boss knows that. I guess the firelight fixed you wrong, as the boss says."

"I think Louis must be right," the missionary submitted gently. "The circumstances point that way."

Jimmy offered no further argument. June, too, remained silent.

"We best let the neches pitch 'em into the lake," the half-breed said brutally.

Jimmy looked up.

"Have they been searched? The formula!"

"They must be buried—properly," the missionary rebuked his servant. "The man's crimes must be forgotten. He has atoned. I will bury them when the Indians have dug proper graves for them."

Jimmy warmed to the churchman.

"Yes," he said cordially. "Meanwhile there's a lot to do. We've got to find that formula. We've got to crash his plant so that it can never be used again. All our work depends for real success on finding that formula he stole from Professor Kenyon. See, Padre, you and Batteau go through the Fort with a hair comb. Search it from roof to cellar. Don't leave a corner of it unsearched till you find that wretched paper. I'll go through this man's clothes, and lay them both out ready for burial. We must be men about this thing, not savages. All we deisre is to put an end to the alphaine traffic. Not to revenge ourselves on these poor dead bodies. And when you're searching keep a sharp eye for that other—white man."

The missionary readily concurred. His eyes were on his half-breed servant with no uncertain censure.

"Yes," he said. "We must have no ruthlessness, Louis.

You and I will leave these to the doctor. That wretched formula is all we need now. That we must have, or all your good work has gone for nothing. Miss June! Will you come with us? It will be better than——"

He indicated the two still forms at their feet. But June shook her head. Her pitying gaze was on the dead woman.

"I think I shall be more use here," she said gently.

The missionary reluctantly acquiesced, though his manner was approving. And June and Jimmy looked after the two men as they passed back into the Fort.

. . . . .

Jimmy stood up from his task. The man's clothing had been thoroughly searched. June had summoned all her courage, and the woman had been searched, too. Now the poor dead things were laid out side by side on the great stone blocks of the quay, and June felt she could have wept for the tragedy of it all.

Jimmy was frowning heavily.

"Juny, dear," he said at last. "There's something wrong."

The girl broke from under the troubled spell that held her. She looked into Jimmy's face. It was hard and set. And she wondered.

"You think we should have found the paper on him?" she asked.

"No. I wasn't thinking of the paper."

"What do you think is—wrong?"

"They've been dead more than twenty-four hours. They weren't shot at daylight to-day. Or any time to-day. Twenty-four hours ago at least. Might be much longer. There's something wrong." Then he smiled whimsically, only to end up in a frown. "You see, dear, I'm a doctor. Someone's forgotten that."

"You think——?"

"That half-breed lied. Why?"

June was gazing into the man's frowning eyes. She was

striving to read the meaning of Jimmy's coldly set face. Then, in a moment, she was looking beyond, past him at the slope up to the misty plateau behind the Fort. Her eyes were wide. A look of incredulous amazement gazed out of them. She flung out an arm pointing.

"Jimmy, look!" she cried. "Coming down off the plateau! Uncle Andy, Spence, and—and some more!"

CHAPTER XXXII

CORPORAL SPENCE COMPLETES HIS WORK

It was with feelings of surging excitement that June watched the moving figures as they clambered down the face of the precipitous slope of the misty plateau. She was filled with the wonder of it. And who were those others who were strangers to her? There were four of them. Two besides the two familiar figures. Then there was Ambuk. She recognized the police scout. And Sandy Alexander. The other three. They were Indians. It was like a veritable army of relief advancing on the Fort.

She and Jimmy stood there watching in silence. Then as the foremost of the party, Uncle Andy and Spence, became lost behind the bulk of the Fort building, June ran to meet them, thrilled with a great gladness.

At the moment of meeting the girl realized the full of what her uncle's coming meant to her. He was an infinitely greater part of her life than she had ever before understood. And as he held both her hands, and she looked into his strong, weatherstained face she knew that though Jimmy had opened for her the doors which admitted her to the radiant visions of a woman's life, this man was a grim, sturdy rock which gave her the safe footing from which to view them.

She smiled up into her uncle's glad, censorious eyes.

"Juny, my dear," he cried, in his deep, strong tones, "you're just the craziest kid a fool uncle ever worried himself grey over. You've lost me more than half a life I'll never find again. I've guessed till my brain ran hot, and

looked like seizing up. You, chasing the world's wilderness where the best you could hope for was all sorts of murder. That's the very best—murder. You, a kid girl running around with a——"

But June had released her hands.

"Don't say it, Uncle Andy, dear! Whatever you do don't say it."

She turned. An imperious movement of her vivid head summoned Jimmy who had leisurely followed her. And she possessed herself of his big hand, and they stood before the amazed eyes of the engineer.

"Now Uncle," she cried challengingly, "you can say it all. All you feel like. You can make it as bad as you like. Jimmy and I have worried through all sorts of troubles and difficulties together, and—and you can't hurt us. You see, we've made up our minds we like difficulties together. So we'll go on looking for them—that way—for the rest of our lives."

Jimmy stood there struggling to resist his natural smile. And suddenly he thrust out the hand which June had left free.

"It's a queer time for this, sir," he said. "But—will you take my hand?"

Just for a moment the men looked squarely into each other's eyes. Then Andrew Kenyon's hand shot out and gripped.

"The best to you both," he said, in his abrupt way. Then his gaze turned to the quay and the lake. "But—all this?"

The light faded out of June's eyes. Jimmy looked back at the head of the stone steps. Spence and the rest who had come up followed his gaze.

"Noel Maddox," Jimmy said, and pointed.

. . . . .

Now June knew them all, those others. The keen-faced, dark-eyed, slight man in uniform was Inspector Dick Ferrers, and Jimmy's great friend. The enormous creature with the

low brow and small head and monstrous body, which suggested infinite brute force, was Vannie Smith from Bluff Lake. And as they stood round the two dead bodies on the quay she wondered at the curious mixture of the gathering. Her uncle and Spence and the scouts and Indians, yes. But what had brought Spence's chief all the way from Athaba? And why Vannie, of all people, with a reputation for shadiness only second to Bucket.

But her speculation was thrust in the background while Jimmy talked. He was briefly outlining to the newcomers the events which had led up to Louis Batteau's storming of the Fort, and of their own and the missionary's timely release from their prison. There were few interruptions of his story. Only once Dick Ferrers put a sharp question.

"And to think that fledging missioner is here, too. Better luck than we hoped, eh, Spence. And even the holy man was goaded to fight, Jimmy?" he smiled.

Jimmy answered thoughtfully.

"I don't remember much myself," he said. "You see, they beat me over the head. I saw his hands go up under the man's guns."

"Oh, he fought," June broke in. "He only weakened when he saw I wasn't being hurt."

"He had brought two scouts with him?" Spence asked in his quiet way. "What were they doing?"

Jimmy's explanation that they had been left sentry in the woods cleared up that point. And no other questions were forthcoming till the story was told.

"It's all been something of a miracle," Jimmy finished, with a glimmer of his smile. "A pretty unpleasant miracle, though."

And Dick Ferrers looked up from his contemplation of the bodies as the doctor passed a hand wearily across his brow.

"Yes," he said keenly. "Certainly a miracle. I guess you're both—all—lucky to be alive." He laughed shortly, eyed the girl standing close to Jimmy's side, and wagged his

head. "But my big wonder is how that missioner, without experience or—or northern nous, beat the trail we've come and got through alive. He's quite a boy. And that Breed of his. Can you beat it, Spence? Those two setting out to hold up a murdering gang, and hoping—and achieving—success. You see, Jimmy, we were really more concerned for him than we were for you two. Miss Kenyon was well-experienced on the rivers. That Breed must be one scrapper. That's easy. But you don't generally find them with bright initiative. I mean when he heard of your capture. He ought to be one of our scouts. We can't let that pass without our big thanks. Personal thanks. Eh, Spence!"

"No, sir. We owe him a lot. I'm not sure he's not entitled to good Government reward," Spence smiled.

"I think so, too," the Inspector said quietly. "He'll certainly have to get what's due to him."

Vannie Smith's eyes caught the reflection of the sun and twinkled as Jimmy turned to his friend with a little gesture of perplexity.

"There's a thing worrying me though, Dick," he said, indicating the bodies on the ground. "For some queer reason that half-breed lied to me about them. For the life of me I don't get his foolish reason."

"Lied? How?"

Ferrers shot a keen look into Jimmy's eyes.

Jimmy gazed down at the white face of Maddox.

"Batteau says he attacked the Fort at daylight this morning. I know that's so. The first shots fired he claims killed these two. That's maybe six or seven hours. These have been dead twenty-four hours. Maybe much more."

Ferrers eyes sparkled, and he shot a look at Spence. Vannie Smith shifted his feet. Spence's steady gaze was on his chief. Andrew Kenyon cleared his throat.

The Inspector laughed easily.

"That's our Doc. talking," he said, and shook his head admonishingly. "I shouldn't let that worry you, Jimmy. You forget. We're anything up to fifteen thousand feet

here. Mountain air. It's enough to freeze a brass image once life's gone. What is it, rigor-mortis ? I've known a body dead stiff in an hour in the high places."

"I allowed for that, Dick. It's the wounds in both I'm going by."

"Ah. That so ?" Ferrers dismissed the matter as of slight concern. "I wouldn't worry that way, either. There isn't a Breed born who won't lie for his own aggrandisement. The thing to me is, that boy has got our dope man. He's saved you and Miss Kenyon and his mission boss from an unholy death—or worse. And now he's doing what we ought to be doing instead of talking here ; scrounging for that dope formula in the secret places of the Fort. We'll go and find those two boys and hand them official thanks, and then get after the paper. You best stop right here, Jimmy, and finish your work. And maybe Miss Kenyon will kindly pass you a hand, if they—" he indicated the bodies—"don't worry her."

Jimmy nodded, and a smile crept back into his eyes.

"I'm coming with you, Dick," he said quietly.

The Inspector stirred and gestured impatiently.

"But you can't leave Miss Kenyon here with——"

"I'm not going to. She's coming, too."

. . . . .

It was a huge room with a block stone floor and stone walls that went up to the roof of the Fort. It had a great similarity of proportion to the big living room at Fort Gateway, and its atmosphere suggested that both of these old-time fortresses had been set up by the same hands. The only differentiation of detail in this room was there were no deeply recessed windows in the thickness of the walls. In place of them, breast-high rifle emplacements had been provided. And these had been recently sealed up. But the place was well lit by the modern construction of a series of long glass windows set high in the outside wall, and these occupied the room's entire length. It was an admission of light to search the remotest corners.

Doubtless, at one time, similar to the living room at Fort Gateway, this great hall had served as an armoury or barrack-room for the original garrison. But its present use was that of a distillery or laboratory, a great factory for Maddox's evil trade.

At least half the available space was given up to a highly scientific plant that was of the most modern and unusual type. It was not a cumbersome thing of vats and pipes and retorts such as is used in the preparing of simple alcohol. It was infinitely finer, more delicate, more complicated.

For the rest, the place had the ordinary setting out of a chemist's laboratory. There were benches, and apparatus, test-tubes, retorts, and an infinity of glass jars and bottles. There was a large, rough table littered with books, and papers, and delicate balances. And a chair was set near to it. The whole place spoke of efficient scientific work. But at the moment it was littered from end to end, in a condition of the utmost confusion.

Alof Lenoir and his half-breed had left nothing unturned, nothing unexamined. The missionary had certainly passed a hair-comb through Maddox's laboratory. And now both men were lost in a close study of the expensive distilling plant occupying its far end.

It was rather wonderful to see the way these two unknowledgeable men scrutinized its smallest detail. It was almost ludicrous that a rough half-breed could find interest in an apparatus that must surely have been beyond his understanding. For the mission-trained student there might have been a certain interest. A thrusting nature, such as his, is never averse from gathering information, however apparently useless. At any rate, so completely were they absorbed that both men straightened up and swung about in a startled fashion at the sound of voices and the approach of many footsteps.

It was Inspector Dick Ferrers who came first. And immediately behind him was the figure of the unemotional Corporal Spence. Behind these two, Vannie Smith, ruffian

and opportunist, walked beside Andrew Kenyon talking together like friends of years. The rear was brought up by June, with Jimmy silent, watchful, intently thoughtful, beside her.

Dick Ferrers's smile was good to look at. His expression of glad greeting suggested all that happy nature which meant so much in his friendship with the doctor of Athaba. He hesitated not an instant. As the two searchers swung round his welcome completely countered the mute questioning of the missionary.

"Padre," he cried, "you two boys have handed us police the scare of our lives. We've made a trail through the world's worst territory that drove me to the determination that if ever I get back alive I'll quit the police and start growing wheat or some other peaceful occupation. We'd got your predecessor on our minds, and couldn't forget the chances you were taking. Man, it was the biggest risk. I want to thank Providence here and now we've come up with you, and you're both safe, and that cursed dope hasn't found place in your bodies. I'm relieved so I want to offer up thanksgiving."

The missionary's earnest eyes beamed. The searching question had completely passed from them. And the half-breed was grinning fatuously.

"It was tough enough—er——"

"Inspector Ferrers," the policeman interjected. "From Athaba."

"Inspector," the churchman responded with simple gravity. "But I had to do it. You see, Corporal Spence and Doctor Paton wouldn't trust to the Indians. I've always believed in the Indian as a creature to be trusted if only you showed him a simple, human understanding. But even so, we came near enough to disaster. Thanks to Louis Batteau here——"

"Yes," nodded Ferrers, quickly turning his smile on the half-breed. "There's more than Providence I want to thank this trip. I've just heard from Doctor Paton the

story of your wonderful fight, your loyalty. It makes me glad to think of what a brave man of goodwill can do."

The Inspector moved towards Louis whose grin had broadened, and whose satisfaction beamed in his plain features. As Ferrers moved, Spence approached the distilling plant so that he was standing close against the missionary.

"Batteau," Ferrers went on, "I want to tell you the Government are offering a reward for such service as you have given. I personally will see you get that reward. And meanwhile I would like to shake your hand."

He thrust out a hand. His cordiality was irresistible. The gesture would not be denied. Vannie Smith had closed up behind him, and Jimmy looked to be on his toes with interest.

The half-breed raised a hand responsively. Ferrers gripped it, and held with surprising tenacity.

"Now!" he cried.

There was a movement. Sudden, swift movement. It was as though Vannie, Andrew Kenyon, Spence and Jimmy had had springs released behind them. The struggle was fierce. But it was over almost as it was begun. And the steel snapped viciously about two pairs of wrists. Alof Lenoir and Louis Batteau stood glaring, furiously impotent, at the assailants grouped about them.

While Vannie and Kenyon held the half-breed, Ferrers went up to him and ripped open his rough pea-jacket. He seized hold of the man's underclothing and tore it apart. He peered at the white skin it covered. Then he stood back.

Then he turned to Spence who was searching the missionary.

He watched the man's deliberate movements as he unfolded a waterproof pocket book, which he had just removed from a secret pocket in the man's vest. It contained but one enclosure. A folded sheet of paper, blue ruled, and with colour matter on its stout edges, and filled with writing in a

fine, running hand. It looked like a page from some account book, or a large-sized diary. Spence gazed at it. Then, without any change of expression, he handed it to his chief.

A moment later Ferrers looked up, coldly measuring the silent missionary with accusing eyes.

"The formula!" he said. Then with a sternness which a few minutes before would have seemed impossible to him: "I arrest you Count Jula von Naarstein, and you Captain Gene Masters," turning abruptly on the bogus half-breed, "for the murder of Alof Lenoir, and his river man, Louis Batteau, on the banks of the Keewin River. Also for the murder of the man known as Bucket, and an unknown man at Bucket's shack north of the Gateway. And I warn you that anything you may say may be used in evidence against you."

The pretended missionary gave no sign. He stood quite still. His eyes were gazing at the accusing Inspector, but without any expression. It was almost as if the shock of calamity had stunned him. Then, perhaps, he realized the uselessness of protest. Or it may have been that the banker's busy, scheming brain was already adjusting itself to the desperateness of the situation. The erstwhile half-breed, however, displayed no such restraint.

His widened, dark eyes rolled as he listened to the charge. And as the last word was spoken he broke out.

"You cursed imbecile," he cried savagely. "You've spoiled everything. Take these irons off. I've been trailing this guy months, ever since he broke from under us in Quebec. I was detached from headquarters at Ottawa for the work. You've ruined the whole play. I'd have got him making the dope. Take these darn things off. By God! I'll make it hot for you."

It was then Von Naarstein suddenly electrified into life. He turned on his companion, and his eyes were full of bitter malevolence. His curling lip suggested a wolfish snarl.

"Trailing me, eh, Gene?" he cried, with suppressed

fury. "You! I think not, you white-livered police crook. If there's to be any hanging for a murdered missionary, the Mauser guns you got cached at Green Lake, and which you've always been known to use at Ottawa, will hand you your fair share in the bumping off. Trailing me? I guess it's the last trail you'll make. You can't double cross me, Gene."

CHAPTER XXXIII

JIMMY RECONSTRUCTS

The room was large and airy. And it was not without comfort. It was a woman's room, with femininity in its every detail, a sort of combination of sleeping quarters and sitting-room. The bed was curtained away at the far end, entirely screened from view. And all the home-made furnishings of the place were trimmed, and pathetically disguised by a tasteful woman's needlecraft. The appeal of it all, the pity of it, affected June whose quick understanding eyes saw these things as only a woman can.

The two prisoners had been disposed of for the time. They were securely held in a well-barred stone room that had once doubtless served as guardroom. They were in the safe charge of Ambuk and Sandy Alexander, whose pride was their police authority.

Now their captors and June were foregathered after a prolonged search, which had left no detail of the old fortress unexplored. June was seated at the window overlooking the beautiful mountain tarn, and the reaction of the whole thing weighed heavily upon her. And while she listened to the talk of the men her heart went out in pity for the poor creature who had given her all for the wretched man who had led her to her violent end.

Jimmy Paton was beside her. And his thoughtful eyes were studying the features of the two men whose photographs were in his hands. Andrew Kenyon was profaning the apartment with clouds of cigar smoke where he sat perched on a small table of doubtful stability. And near to

him Vannie Smith's heavy jaws were chewing steadily while he squatted on a low chest with an upholstered top. Dick Ferrers and Corporal Spence were at a small table that had been used as the woman's desk, on which were laid two Mauser repeating rifles, and a pair of automatic pistols of similar make.

Ferrers had just sealed an envelope containing the ghastly formula whose possession proclaimed the success of their work. It was in an envelope he had found in the desk, and it was sealed with mauve wax which had been found in the same drawer. He looked up at the two figures under the window.

"There's no human eyes'll see that again till it reaches Ottawa," he declared, with a sigh of satisfaction. "And that," he added, smoothing out the envelope, "is just that." Then his considering gaze surveyed the calm face of his subordinate. "You're in luck, Corporal," he said kindly. "And it's only what you deserve. This is quite unofficial, of course. That poisonous paper will go down to Ottawa with all your written reports to me, and your full account of all that's happened. And they'll be accompanied by my covering letter. It won't be my fault if the Government reward doesn't come your way. My congratulations on smart work."

Spence flushed with pleasure.

"Vannie Smith'll need some of that reward, sir," he said quickly. Then he added awkwardly: "Thank you, sir."

Jimmy passed the two photographs back to his friend.

"There's no doubt about 'em," he said. "They're our birds, in spite of Naarstein's beard. That man Masters worked a swell disguise. As a chemist I'm intrigued. He was white when he held us up. I wonder what muck he uses that turns him almost to Indian colour. Von Naarstein defeats me. A banker! A millionaire!"

"Not a millionaire banker," Ferrers corrected. "Millionaire head of the greatest dope organization in this continent. Mark! Continent not country. Ottawa's known it years,

but never got a chance. He was always too clever. Cocaine! Heroin! All the known drugs. The brain of a genius; the heart of a devil. When this alphaine came through he saw the end of cocaine. It meant to him Maddox's life, and this paper to—destroy or use. I should think use."

"Yes." Jimmy's manner was considering. "This Masters? There's nothing I s'pose to what he claimed?"

Ferrers shook his head decidedly.

"Nothing to save him from the rope," he said grimly. "I could wish there were, for the credit of the Force. No. He's a crook, and bad. There were plenty in the service who knew it. In the underworld he was known as 'The Killer.' As usual our chiefs thought him a sort of archangel. He'll swing. They both will—thanks to Vannie Smith."

June turned away to the view of the lake. In spite of their crimes, it gave her no satisfaction to know these men would hang. Jimmy was only concerned with the problem of it.

"It's not clear yet," he said, a little peevishly. Then he added whimsically: "I hate it when things aren't clear."

Ferrers clasped his hands with his elbows on the desk and laughed.

"The searching chemist, eh?"

"Chemist, rot!" exclaimed the other. "Get after it, Dick. Tell us why. June's guessing, too. And Smith and Spence. All of us. You got around when you were most needed. Was it conscience for sending me to this forgotten country?"

"Ingratitude!" Ferrers laughed. "You might have netted that fifty thousand dollars if Spence hadn't been too smart. Think what fifty thousand dollars would have meant to you—us."

"Get on, man."

Inspector Ferrers sat back in his chair. He lit a cigarette and smilingly inhaled.

"Ye-es," he considered. "You know, my story's nothing

to the rest. It's Spence and Smith who can tell you. It's weeks back. I got word, we all did. Von Naarstein had made a getaway from Quebec, where he lived. A circular letter and police photograph. We were to keep a bright look out. If seen we were to report, but not arrest. I knew all about him. I dealt with the instructions and pigeon-holed them."

June's interest had come back. She sat with her chin cupped in her hands, completely absorbed. Andrew Kenyon and Vannie were eagerly watching the officer. The only one to appear uninterested was Corporal Spence.

"No. I wasn't worried. Von Naarstein was a household word amongst us. Then a month later I heard again. This time I sat up. It was a general S.O.S. for Captain Gene Masters, head of the Secret Police! He was wanted—badly. He was to be arrested wherever found, and returned to Ottawa under strong guard. I got a line of information specially. He was believed to be north. It seemed Von Naarstein was directly under his surveillance when he made his getaway. He, Masters, dumped the blame of that getaway on Detective Sergeant Abe Butcher. He put it over General Bunsten that was so, and asked to be detached on the trail of Von Naarstein. Bunsten fell for the bluff. Abe Butcher was sore on Masters. We knew him, too. Knew 'the Killer,' who had his price with the underworld. So he got after him. In a month he passed his story in. Gene Masters was Von Naarstein's working partner and chief gunman. His official position was the Count's bulwark between him and Ottawa."

Jimmy nodded.

"I see. The two of 'em had set out after—alphaine."

"But I didn't know it then," Ferrers smoked thoughtfully. "After you went up, and I got Spence's reports of alphaine, and of your adventures on the river, and of Bucket's murder, though I saw nothing to link up with these men I began to think hard. I was even then of a mind to make the trip. I should have done so right away only we

were cursedly short-handed. However, when the final S.O.S. came after your search of Bucket's shack, I got more than a glimmer. Alphaine. Dope. Von Naarstein supposed to have gone north. I came right away. And luck was with us. I picked up Spence and Smith, here, on Moon Lake as they came back from Keewin River."

He pinched out his cigarette.

"I showed those photographs to Spence and got the shock of a lifetime. They were the photographs of the new missionary on Green Lake, with a beard, and his half-breed. The latter he decided only after long consideration. He saw through the disguise. Then Vannie Smith took a look, and left us both staggered. They were the two men he'd seen on the Keewin. You carry on, Spence."

Corporal Spence bestirred his muscular body. He did his best in a terse, reluctant sort of way.

"There isn't a lot I can tell, sir," he said, clearing his throat. "You, Doc., know right up to where I beat it down to put the screw on Vannie here." He smiled faintly. "That screw wasn't needed. I found him crazy with worry to hand out his story. Hadn't slept at nights for the ghost of what he'd seen on the Keewin, when he was away down —shooting. He'd seen a thick black column of smoke that made him wonder. So, his—shooting—being through he beat it down the Keewin to investigate. He stalked the camp of two men on the river bank. And they had a fire as big as a house. He used the woods, and they never got wise. One feller was a white. The other talked white, but looked a Breed river man. The whiteman was dressed like a missioner. They'd got two naked human bodies beside the fire. One was white and the other a shade darker. And they were butchering them into chunks and feeding their fire with the meat."

June exclaimed with an ejaculation of horror. She turned, sickened, to the window. Jimmy, too, stirred uneasily. Only Vannie seemed to enjoy the situation. He was grinning in a kind of way. Kenyon smoked more heavily.

Spence went on like a mechanical recorder.

"Vannie took me to his—shooting—ground. Then to the Keewin. There was a pile of ash. Must have been tons. I searched. There were bones cached in the ground. Charred bones, including two skulls. I found oddments. Clothes had been burnt. There was a big tree nearby to that fire. It was thick with human fat where the fire smoke had sprayed it. Vannie had located that camp just when the new missionary must have been right there on his way up to us. I started back with a bunch of new ideas. Then I met Inspector Ferrers."

He spread out his hands.

"Then we knew," he said. "We all hit back for Green Lake on the dead jump. And we found Kenyon had pulled in from a trip, and was crazy mad Miss June had beat for Bucket's river with you, Doc. And the missionary and his Breed had hit out overland with an outfit of neches."

"Had he left any word?" Jimmy asked.

"Not a word," Spence replied, with another of his faint smiles. "Then Mr Ferrers and I put O-Kuk through it. We handed him a Third Degree that made him see stars. And we got what we wanted. Three neches who were ready to trail the missionary if it took us to the Pole. Before we set out we went through the Mission. We got some useful stuff there. Anongst the rest, guns like those." He nodded at the guns on the table. "They told us a deal. Those boys and Maddox, too, would have been brighter if they'd used the sort of guns this territory knows. There was a big outfit of alphaine, too. I fancy that came from Bucket's shack when Gene Masters went up there and killed up Miss June's 'grey-face.'"

"That would be when he was supposed to make Vannie's to buy store guns?" Jimmy suggested.

"Vannie says he never got along," Spence agreed. "I guess Gene Masters was 'The Killer' all along the line."

"It's clearing." Jimmy's eyes were smiling thoughtfully. Then he looked at his friend, and he grinned broadly. "I'm

not much of a policeman, but I'm a good chemist. See if I mix the dope right."

Dick Ferrers lit another cigarette and sat back.

"And see if you can guess the riddle of their play with you and Miss June on the river," he said. "If it was clever I don't know about it. Maybe they meant to pass you Mervyn Arden's end. The end Maddox handed him. Then make an undisturbed getaway. I guess there's a catch somewhere I don't get."

"Yes. If the answer is as I see it there's a wiseish play in it," Jimmy smiled. "It was quite bright. And it wasn't 'The Killer's' idea."

He caught up one knee and nursed it. The twinkle of his eyes was full of eager intelligence.

"It's worth looking back over if it's only as a problem. There's always interest in the workings of the mind of a killer. And the mind of the man who knew how to use him," he added thoughtfully. "It was a wonderful combination of well-mated psychology. We must get back to the original trade of these two. We see the bottom of it dropping out with the coming of this alphaine. For them, with an amazing organization, it must have been as though the earth's foundations were falling through. I see them putting that organization to tracing the origin of alphaine. Lesser men, when they discovered Bucket & Co., would have dealt with it through that organization with 'The Killer's' aid. But Naarstein saw in the formula the essence of the situation. So long as it was in other hands there was danger. No. The risk demanded personal action. He and Masters would only trust themselves. What then would satisfy? Maddox's life and possession of the formula. And death for anyone in contact with alphaine. Now how?

"Green Lake," Jimmy went on, in the manner of a man who must marshal his facts in orderly sequence. "They could reach it from Athaba, or the Hudson's Bay. There were other ways, too. But they decide on Hudson's Bay as the best means of avoiding the police. Naarstein must slip

away. And his escape, carefully managed, would give Masters the excuse to go after him with official permission. And it would allow of the northward trail. Ottawa knew of alphaine in the north. And, you see, Von Naarstein is known for his dope trade. Then, if things go amiss, Masters has his answer. He is pursuing the Count. So I see them both at Keewin, where is the Mission College. And we find them favoured by satanic luck.

"Mervyn Arden dead, and to be replaced by a new missionary from the College. A man of no great experience. They learn it. How, doesn't matter. And the mind of 'The Killer' leaps. You follow? A new missionary will reach Green Lake but not the one that left the Mission College. The quick brain of Von Naarstein sees the immense advantage to their plans. It stands out a mile. So I see two outfits on the river, the one dogging the other.

"There's no hurry. Many hundreds of miles to go. Hudson's Bay is lost behind them, and the heart of the wilderness is reached. Then is the time to act. So we see what Vannie Smith saw below Moon Lake. A new missionary and his river half-breed continue the journey to Green Lake. It's all so easy to the man with the mind of a killer. And the man whose scruple doesn't exist.

"But 'The Killer' is possessed of a lust he can't really control. And when on the journey they hear the approach of a motor-boat they understand that it must belong to the police. 'The Killer' decides at once; remembering there are falls behind the police boat which will hide up the crime. But he fails. Then I seem to see them discovering Bucket. Bucket the cool, sleek, callous detrimental, who fears neither man or devil. The new missionary! They foregather. They learn who he is, already knowing of him. Then 'The Killer.' They want his cargo——"

"But he carried none," broke in the harsh voice of Vannie Smith.

Jimmy's smile broadened. And the policemen found amusement in the man's interruption.

"That's so," agreed Jimmy. "It had been passed along. But they didn't know that. And when they searched they missed his tobacco sack. Anyhow 'The Killer's' lust was satisfied. They reach Green Lake where one thing after another falls into their laps. They learn the whole story of alphaine. Nothing known is hidden from them. It is just wonderful! Stupendous! There's nothing for them to do but get after it. Spence is to go to Bucket's shack later. 'The Killer' makes the journey first. Making excuse of going to Vannie's. 'Grey-face.' Another orgy for 'The Killer.' The search. A cargo of alphaine which 'grey-face' has brought for Bucket to trade when he returns. 'The Killer' amuses himself in Maddox's name, and to give colour to his work. That seem clear?"

Ferrers nodded, and Spence eyed his doctor friend with undisguised admiration.

"Now we come to the work of the subtler mind. Maddox must be reached quickly. How? The Indians obviously. There looks to be no stupendous difficulty. But Von Naarstein is more of an artist than his partner, except in killing. All whites at Green Lake are searching. The whole thing is known. All are looking for the formula to destroy it. Von Naarstein wants it for himself. He plans his coup. It will be so easy. The Indians. He has Bucket's dope to pay them with. The killing of Maddox. The discovery of the factory. Then the secret will be his. And on his return his frank report to us. Failure! All his work for nothing. And later he can quietly fade away unquestioned, with the formula in his possession to use or destroy as he chooses. But his plan is confused by June, here. She intends to go by Bucket's river to the Maddox stronghold, and makes no secret of it. Of course, it would be easy with a killer on hand to upset June's plans. They have the same weapons as those used by Maddox. The whole thing would be put down to Maddox. But that would involve police, and still more police. Then there is a doctor to be disposed of, too. No. It might suit 'The Killer,' but not the man who merely

wants the formula and an undisturbed getaway. One thing, however, is certain. June and the doctor-man must be dealt with. They must not be left to arrive at Fort Lindsay *after* Maddox has been accounted for and the formula obtained. It would give the game away completely. So Von Naarstein designs a careful little scheme, a little play acting which shall achieve his purpose and incidentally surround his identity as a missionary with an heroic glamour in the eyes of those—Corporal Spence, Andrew Kenyon, Doctor Paton and June Kenyon—whom he urgently desires to placate."

Jimmy released his knee and smiled round on June. Then he took a cigarette from the policeman and lit it.

"Does it fit?" he asked. "I think so. He's to go overland with the Indians. Obviously it is a much more direct, shorter route. And one the Indians know quite well. He reaches his destination, having sent out scouts to watch the river for us. He and 'The Killer' reach the Fort here with their Indian guides. They advance upon it. And, discovering Maddox and his woman on the quay, 'The Killer' gets to work. Their battle is fought out then. Then they obtain the formula—doubtless on the person of Noel Maddox. I doubt if that waterproof pocket book we got from the Count was one he had brought ready for it. Then, after a look round, they prepare to deal with June and myself. The mind of Von Naarstein."

Jimmy relit his cigarette which he had forgotten.

"'The Killer' removes his half-breed disguise and sets out with his outfit of three boats by the secret way from the lake to bring back his captives. You remember that hill creek I located, June? Von Naarstein with his two scouts heads overland for our camp. He leaves his scouts cached in the forest, and joins us. And he sits there beside our fire waiting for 'The Killer.' Do you see? Bound and gagged we are all taken to the Fort. And I do my clown act in releasing the poor, helpless, suffering missionary while in the depths of despair as to what the dead Maddox

will do to the distressed white girl who has fallen into his power. And it all went like clockwork, except that they forgot I was a doctor, and that Spence, and an infuriated uncle, and the long arm of the Mounted Police, were in a position to interfere. But for those things we should all have returned to Green Lake believing that 'The Killer' was a top size hero whom we could never adequately repay for his rescue of us, and that alphaine was wiped out for ever. Then one day, if we were still at Green Lake, which would be unthinkable for anybody but a Corporal who has to obey orders, we should learn that Alof Lenoir would have been recalled. And the missing formula would have passed out of all knowledge until alphaine again raised its ghastly head. I think that's the story of it as those two saw it. But thank Providence Vannie Smith went—shooting—on Moon Lake. And Corporal Spence was the man in charge of Green Lake."

Jimmy attended to his cigarette and Dick Ferrers stood up.

"Yes. It all fits, Jimmy," he said. "I mean it fits with the psychology of the two men. And it would have worked. Yes. It would, it should have worked, but for——"

June looked up.

"I think so, too, Mr Ferrers. You, and Spence, and Vannie, and uncle were the active agents. But——"

Dick Ferrers nodded.

"And we must still be the active agents. When we leave here there won't be a recognizable fragment of Noel Maddox's plant. And there'll be nothing burnable in this Fort that isn't reduced to ashes."

He glanced round him and his manner was inviting.

"Will you folks come and pass a hand?"

. . .

June and Jimmy were alone for a moment. The others had gone out on their work of destruction. The girl's smiling eyes were gazing up admiringly into her lover's face.

"You know, Jimmy, I think you were rather wonderful piecing it all together that way. I'm sure you were right. What terrible creatures they are. That killer! Ugh! And to think we were all bothered and deceived by Lenoir's religious fervour, and what we believed was his—his—incompetence. But what did you and Mr Ferrers mean about that reward being so useful to 'you—us'?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Why, you see, I'm a chemist. And I've—I've discovered a way of extracting oil fuel from coal. A new and absurdly cheap process. He's my partner. Capital like that would have been very useful to us. It would have saved us a lot of worry. There's millions in the discovery—many, many millions."

"Millions?" June clapped her hands. "Why, Jimmy, darling, that'll make us ever so rich, won't it? Oh, dear, what a pity I've so much money, too. Never mind." She tiptoed and kissed him.

"Come along, dear. I'm in the mood to go out and break things. Indeed, I am. I feel absolutely wicked. Alphaine! Yes. What was it the Germans used to say in the war? 'Sink without a trace,' wasn't it?—or something that meant that anyway."

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